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**Employer Branding: Innovative ways of collaboration
between the case company and Engineering students**

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Thesis abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to provide the case company with recommendations on how to enhance employer branding practices and boost the young talent attraction by implementing innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students in Finland. In order to do it, the company's current employer brand practices were examined and Company's traditional ways of collaboration with students were analysed.

The research design included qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with the company representatives and graduate students from Aalto University School of Engineering. The thesis focuses mainly on Helsinki area, however the recommendations provided in Chapter 7 can be used in any biggest students' cities in Finland.

Through the research, it was found that the case company had established the Innovation Node at Aalto University Campus for conducting practical projects jointly with University. However, the Innovation Node has been closed last year. It has been decided to further investigate the Innovation Node idea as the innovative way of collaboration with engineering students; also to collect and analyze students' feedback, who participated in the projects.

The students' interviews revealed that the idea of having such Innovation platform at University Campus as well as networking, constant coaching and mentoring provided by the company's representatives is the best way of get students interesting in the company as an employer.

Based on the interviews, the author has presented recommendations directed towards improvement of the existing employer branding practices of the case company; and the second part of recommendations relate to the increasing collaboration with students through the innovative approach.

Keywords: Employer brand image, Employer Branding, Employee value proposition, Employment, experience, Talent attraction, Generation Y

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Abbreviations

CEO	Chief executive officer
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
GEN Y	Generation Y
IDBM	International Design Business Management
ICT	Informational and communications technology
PDP	Product Development Project
R&D	Research and Development
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VAMK	Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulu
VP	Vice President

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1 Introduction

The business environment that companies nowadays act in is dynamic and continuously changing, which is why the acquisition of competent employees with technical skills is vital. The competition among companies for qualified human resources is intense, as companies need to distinguish themselves from others (Gaddam, 2008, 45-55). The situation is even more complicated because of the ongoing demographic changes around the world (Moroko and Uncles 2008, 161). Therefore, attracting suitable employees has become similar to the traditional marketing problem of attracting customers (cf. Ewing et al. 2002, 15).

Employer branding has been a very popular concept in the recent years. Companies are investing more than ever in their employer brand, as they start to understand its value. Employer brand helps companies to develop their unique features, differentiate within employment market and choose the right social media channels to engage with the target audience. However, employer branding is not only about attracting new employees into business, it is also important for employee retention and engagement in the culture and the strategy of the company.

The purpose of the thesis is to find innovative ways of collaboration between the case company and Engineering students in Finland. The case company is a multinational corporation headquartered in Helsinki, Finland. However, at the company's request, its name will not be disclosed. Theoretical part discusses the employer branding definition and its key concepts, such as employer brand image, employee value proposition, employee experience and attractiveness. Generation Y's characteristics in the workplace are also studied. The research is done applying qualitative semi-structured interviews with the companies' representatives and students in the engineering area.

The aim of the research is to analyze the current employer branding practices of the case company, and to provide recommendations regarding the innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students to change already established brand perceptions of Company and attract top university graduates with the right

potential.

A number of interviews with the company representatives were conducted in order to explore the current employer brand practices of Company. In particular, what traditional methods of collaboration with Engineering students are used and what are the Business needs with regard to talent acquisition. The students' interviews are conducted to explore the students' opinion about the Company's Innovation Node established at Aalto University Campus, as the existing innovative method of collaboration. The final chapter includes improvement suggestions and recommendations for the case company based on theory and research findings.

1.1 Case Company and problem statement

The name of the case company will not be disclosed, at the request of the company. Therefore, the company will be referred as "Company" in this thesis. Company is a multinational industrial group based in Finland, which has operations in more than 70 countries around the world. Company's head office is located in Helsinki.

In order to compete and differentiate itself from competitors, Company has been building a strong employer brand to attract people with the right attitude, mindset and competences. Mission, vision and values are statements through which the company defines itself internally and externally.

To reflect changes in a business environment, Company is currently refreshing its brand and sharpening the strategy and mission. It is no longer positioning itself as just a heavy industry company. Company is also focusing on digitalizing its operations and customer offerings. A new digital organization has been established with the aim of accelerating digital transformation. It is, therefore, essential to transform the external brand communication to change already established brand perceptions of the company. Also, in order to meet market demands and stay competitive, Company needs to attract and recruit engineering graduates with the latest knowledge in the area.

Company has already built quite unique relationships with university and schools in Vaasa. However, due to the fact that technical and R&D operations are located in Vaasa, Company is not so well known among Engineering student in other cities of Finland. The most critical areas are Helsinki and Tampere. There are plenty of appealing companies in Finland, thus the talent attraction in a competitive market has always been a challenge. Company needs to stand out from its competitors and boost the young talent attraction by implementing innovative ways of collaboration with students from the engineering area.

1.2 Objectives of the thesis

The objective of the thesis is to investigate what innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students can be implemented by the case company, in order to change already established brand perceptions of Company and attract top university graduates with the right potential. The main theoretical objectives of the research are to examine theoretical foundations of the concepts of employer branding and characteristics of Generation Y, including their preferences for organizational attractiveness.

The research design included qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with the company representatives and graduate students from Aalto University School of Engineering. For the internal qualitative interviews the following company representatives were selected: HR Specialists of Global Resourcing and Employer Brand function, Director of Culture and People, Director of Communications, Director of Digital Ventures, VP of Digital Portfolio Management and Director of Digitalization. The main purpose was to understand the current employer brand practices of Company, in particular what traditional methods of collaboration with Engineering students are used. A Business view on the company's employer brand and the Business needs with regard to talent acquisition were studied as well.

The external qualitative interviews were conducted with students who participated in the Product Development Project (PDP) and International Design Business

Management (IBFD) projects at Company Innovation Node. The main purpose was to explore the students' opinion about the Innovation Node established at Aalto University Campus to increase collaborative activities with students; and how, in their opinion, the traditional methods of collaboration can be brought to the next level to become more interesting.

Recommendations provided in chapter 7 are based on the theory and research findings. The first set of recommendation directed towards the company's current employer branding practices. The second set of recommendations concern the innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students that can be implemented by Company.

2 Employer branding as a concept

Employer branding has been a very popular concept in the recent years. Simon Barrow and Tim Ambler first defined the concept in the *Journal of Brand Management* in 1996. In response to the growing competition of talents, building a strong employer brand became a major focus of activity between 2004 and 2008. Companies like Unilever, Shell or P&G began to apply the same focus to their employer branding as they applied to the corporate and product branding. Employer branding is mainly focused on strategic alignment of human capital with organization goals (Sullivan, 2004). It helps companies to develop their unique features, differentiate within a competitive employment market and therefore attract potential recruits. Additionally, it ensures that current employees are engaged in the culture and strategy of a company.

The aim of the chapter is to present a conceptual framework that can help to understand the employer branding in general. Employer brand is developed to be consistent with all other branding efforts of the company, i.e. product and corporate brand (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, 503). This chapter also explains the difference between the product brand, corporate brand and employer brand. The following central concepts will be discussed: employer brand and employer branding, organizational identity, employee value propositions and employee experience.

2.1 Definition of employer branding

In modern society companies consider their brand as the greatest asset, while people are most significant resource. A brand can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible attributes designed to build the reputation of products, services or place, and to create identity of organization (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015, 1). Branding was originally used to differentiate tangible products, thus companies have mainly focused their branding efforts towards developing products and corporate brands. However, over the years it has been widely used in the area of Human Resource Management for differentiation of companies and people.

Barrow (2007, 12-14) discusses two main distinctions between the employer brand and the corporate brand or product brand. Firstly, the employer brand is an employment specific, which means that it characterizes the company's identity as an employer. Secondly, it aims at both internal and external audiences. Whereas corporate or product brands are primarily directed at the external audience. Despite these differences, the employer brand is considered as a part of corporate brand. This emphasizes the need to focus on organizational values, culture, communications and employees, who create positive associations and is aimed at creating attractive image of company in internal and external labor markets (Mokina, 2014, 138).

One of the earliest and most commonly used definition of employer branding was presented by Amber and Barrow (1996, 187), who defined it as: "The package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company". In the terminology of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, 502) the employer branding is: "...the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors". More recent definition given by McLeod and Waldman (2011, 8), describes the employer branding as: "... the perception of an organization as a great place to work in the eyes of current employees, prospective employees and people external to the organization".

There are some differences emerging in these definitions. However, all these definitions are based on idea of organizational identity, which is linked onto idea of employer branding. Albert and Whetten (1985, 220-221) suggested that organizational identity is the central and distinctive character of an organization. Considerable amount of researches explain circumstances under which people are more likely to identify themselves with an organization. The organization that has a good reputation or image and a positive employer brand can attract more identification from employees. Cole and Burch (2006, 585-605) showed that the stronger the organizations' identity the less likely employees intend to leave. Organizational identification is the degree to which members define themselves by the same attributes that they believe define the organization.

In literature, employer branding described as a three-step process. Firstly, the value proposition of a company needs to be developed, which is then marketed to potential employees. Information about the organization's culture, management style and current employment image develops a concept of particular values that companies offers to employees (Sullivan, 2002). The value proposition is based on the perceived attractiveness and facilitates the central message of the organizational employer brand (Eisenberg, et al., 2011). Once the offering is identified and clarified, it needs to be communicated to existing and potential employees.

Employer branding combines the internal and external communication, which helps to create a consistent employment experience and can also enhance the employee's engagement (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, 502-503). Following this, the second step can be described as the external marketing of employer brand positions that enables to attract the best possible employees. However, building company reputation and recruiting talents is not the only aspect of employer branding, which companies should focus on. Another important aspect and the third step is internal marketing, the purpose of which is to develop workforce that is committed to the values and goals established by the company (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, 502-503). Thus, the internal marketing contributes to employee retention or employee willingness to stay with the organization.

To create more clarity, the important elements of employer branding concept will be further discussed in the following chapter 2.2.

2.2 Employer branding: a conceptual framework

"[...] every employer has an employer brand, whether they have defined the attributes and image they would like to be associated with, or not. In other words, brands, like reputations, are ultimately defined by people's perceptions." (Barrow and Mosley, 2005).

Two large elements create a strong employer brand, which are employee value proposition (EVP) and employment experience. An EVP helps the company to

create the promise they want to provide to their current and future employees. Whereas, employment experience is actual delivery of the promise throughout various stages of the employee life cycle (Rosethorn, 2009, 20). A model by Rosethorn (2009, 20) illustrates the relationship between EVP and employment experience, and the outcomes of a strong employer brand. It is essential that the external promise and the internal employment experience complement one another.



Figure 1 Elements of employer brand (Rosethorn 2009, 20)

The elements presented in the figure above are described in chapter 2.2.1 Employee Value Proposition, chapter 2.2.2 Employment experience and chapter 2.2.3 Brand strength.

2.2.1 Employer Value Proposition

The employee value proposition (EVP) constitutes the core of an employer brand and is related to the unique selling proposition concept in marketing. Customer value proposition provides the reason for a customer to buy the company's product; EVP does the same thing for the company's recruitment and employee engagement (Mosley, 2014, 123). A key question for the company is to verify that the proposition is indeed attractive, unique and credible to talents, who are not currently employed (Rosethorn, 2009, 20-23). The EVP helps to answer the question of why the motivated and well-qualified candidate should prefer one company to all the others.

According to Michaels et al (2001, 43), EVP is “the holistic sum of everything people experience and receive while they are part of a company – everything from the intrinsic satisfaction of the work to the environment, leadership, colleagues, compensation and more”. The EVP is not only designed to be a comprehensive description of everything company offers employees, but a more clear description of the most differentiating pillars of the brand. The global leader in employer branding, Universum (Universum official website) states that the EVP reflects a company’s competitive advantage. Employers, managing their EVP effectively, benefit from an increase in their talent pool and employee engagement.

The process of creating the EVP is the same as creating a mission and vision for a company; it shows to the shareholders what the company aims to be. The company needs to build its future goals upon the core values that are sets of ideas the organization believes in (Mosley and Barrow, 2005, 117-121). Different core values are helping to understand what to focus on when creating the EVP.

Both Hubschmid (2012, 122) and Rosethorn (2009, 20-23) agree that the company’s EVP must be distinctive and compelling to the target audience, and it needs to capture both rational and emotional aspects. The EVP needs to be relevant and meaningful for the employees, otherwise they will not feel the need to commit to it. It is also recommended to create a draft of the EVP before publishing, and to validate the draft propositions inside the organization to ensure that the EVP clearly describes reality of the company (Rosethorn, 2009, 20-23).

According to Hubschmid (2012, 122), the definition of EVP follows a closed cycle. The first step for the employer is to define its target audience. Rosethorn (2009, 29) suggests that EVP can be segmented into sub-EVPs for different target groups. For example, target groups may be recent graduates or highly experienced specialists. Only after clarifying the target talent segments the company can proceed with developing its EVP. It is not possible to attract everyone as people have distinctive employee expectations due to differences in age, gender, educational background, or culture. Therefore, EVP needs to be distinctive specifically according to each target segment’s expectations (Hubschmid, 2012, 52-56).

The second step is to examine the current employer image, preferences of target segments, employer characteristics, company's brand strategy, positioning of competitors. This will give the company understanding of what makes it unique and how to best define its EVP (Hubschmid, 2012). "When defining the EVP, a company has to think of where it is superior and where inferior compared with its competitors. In other words, companies need to think strategically about their current and potential employees" (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2008, 43). The final step is the implementation, which includes such activities as setting rules, processes and compiling the communication material to start the employer branding campaign.

Companies need to create and develop an EVP aimed not only to attract future employees, but also motivate the current ones. Based on the marketing theory, Dyhre and Parment (2009, 101-103) suggested three steps that help companies to identify and fill in the gaps between the desired EVP and the current EVP:

1. Identity. First, the company needs to clarify how employees currently perceive the EVP or expect the company to be. What are the career opportunities and how the company can help to link individual career needs with organizational opportunities?
2. Profile. This step helps the company to evaluate how the company is perceived and viewed by the current employees as an employer. What aspects are most valued and what can be improved in the future.
3. Image. This step should be done with the help of external shareholders in order to understand how the company is perceived as an employer from the outside world. To answer to this part, the company needs to ask the target group how do they perceive the company as an employer? (Dyhre and Parment, 2009, 101-103).

The biggest challenge for the overall proposition is ensuring that it makes the grade with both the company and the prospective candidates. It is essential to have a full support from the company leadership, as without this, it's impossible to implement the new brand in any consistent way.

2.2.2 Employee experience

Since branding has become a multi-disciplinary concept, the focus has shifted from consideration of goods and services to the organization, person, and activity. Both product brand and employer brand have components that determine how brand is built and perceived. The product brand components determine the product as desired purchase. Within employer branding the branded product will be a unique and particular employer experience. Companies should closely manage their employees experience, because this would help create values and influence (Edwards, 2010, 13).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, 511) write that employer experience is organizational specific and consists of a complex set of features. One aspect of organization's offering is its package of economic and financial rewards (Amber and Barrow 1996, 185). Additionally, companies will differ in the provision of benefits and rewards, also the degree to which intangible experience are provided and valued by employees. Once the offering is identified, it will be then communicated to existing and potential employees, as employer branding also involves extensive communication campaign (Edwards, 2010, 7).

There are various theorists' views on the employment experience. McLeod and Waldman (2011, 50) claim that the employee experience has a significant influence on a company's employer brand at each phase of the employee lifecycle. Employer brand is influenced through employees sharing their experiences with their professional and personal networks, which then can reach wider audience (McLeod and Waldman, 2011, 21). As seen in the figure 2, McLeod and Waldman (2011, 15) provide a theory of how employee experience is built in five different steps from attracting the employees to their transition.

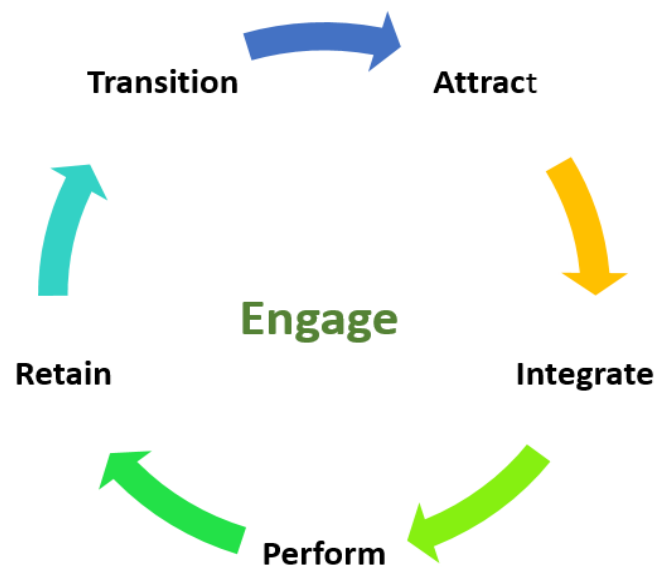


Figure 2 Employee experience (McLeod & Waldman, 2011, 15)

McLeod and Waldman's employee lifecycle consists of the following phases: *Attract*, *Integrate*, *Perform*, *Retain*, and *Transition*. The *attract* phase is about setting up the optimal conditions for the best candidates to want to work for a company. It includes elements such as brand awareness, company reputation, and interview process. The *integrate* phase begins when the employee has accepted the job offer. This phase is about integrating into the team, job tasks, and company culture, etc. The more defined the employer brand, the faster the employee will learn his or her requirements and start adding value.

After the employee has successfully integrated into the workplace, the next phase occurs. The *perform* phase includes the following elements: engagement, satisfaction towards the company, learning and development. At this stage, when doing the job in a regular basis, employees perceive the promise the company made in EVP (McLeod and Waldman, 2011, 14-20). *Retain* occurs when the employee is close to mastery of his or her current job and ready to take the next step within the developing new skills and knowledge. At this stage the organization should keep a close relationship with the employee to help identify what the next step might be in his or her career.

The final phase is *transition*, which may take place when the person transitions to a new position within the organization or moves to another company. The lifecycle starts over from the first phase, *attract*. If the move is within the company, then the cycle starts again from the *integrate* phase of the employee lifecycle (McLeod and Waldman. 2011, 14-20).

Barrow and Mosley (2005, 150) provide more detailed employee experience model with twelve key dimensions, which they refer to as the employer brand mix. These 12 areas are divided into organizational (policy) and local (practice) contexts.



Figure 3 The employer brand mix (Barrow & Mosley 2005, 150)

Barrow and Mosley (2005, 150) suggest that the employer brand mix helps to assess the current employer brand and planning how to deliver the employer brand

proposition. This experience is composed of elements such as recruitment and induction, team management, performance appraisal, reward and recognition, values and corporate social responsibility of the company, internal communication, etc.

Employees encounter these elements throughout the employee lifecycle. Although Barrow and Mosley (2015, 150) do not include *attraction* and *transition* phases as a part of the employment experience, they do include induction, learning and development; and different elements of *retaining* such as working environment, rewards and recognition. Thus, Barrow and Mosley (2005, 150) focus more on the employment experience during the employees' stay at the company.

Employer branding can have a positive or negative impact on expectations and experiences of the employees at every stage of their employment lifecycle, from attraction to retention. Even when the employee has left the company, employer brand has the potential to influence the willingness of employees to recommend the company to potential employees or customers. If EVP and employment experience are consistent with one another, the EVP will contribute to an employer brand image, which will be attractive to the potential employees, and therefore the company will be known to meet expectations (Hubschmid, 2012).

2.2.3 Employer brand strength

Strong employer brand is the outcome of a coherent functioning of employee value proposition (EVP) and employment experience, as shown in Figure 1. To further strengthen the employer brand, and to properly utilize the EVP and employment experience, several other factors require consideration. In this chapter, elements of employer brand strength such as employer attractiveness, and employee engagement will be analyzed.

Employer brand attractiveness

One of the main purposes of creating a strong employer brand is to attract and recruit the right potential employees (Barrow and Mosley 2005, xvi). In order to do

so, the company have to ensure that it is in fact appealing to the right people (Hubschmid, 2012, 46). Most theorists agree that the attraction of right candidates for a company is an essential part of creating a strong employer brand. Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005, 156) define employer attractiveness as, “The envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization.” It is important to understand characteristics of an attractive employer, what desired prospective employees value and what job attributes they consider being most important. Dyhre and Parment (2009, 87-88) suggest some of the most common attractive employer characteristics:

- Quality working relationships (trust, respect, self-worth, and recognition);
- Leadership (good managers and team leaders);
- Participation (the ability to contribute to decision-making);
- Clear values (employees understand the company’s competitive advantage);
- Learning and feedback: (personal development and regular feedback);
- Meaning and fun (a purpose to work, which makes it enjoyable).

However, having general attractive employer characteristics will not always be precise. It is important to know the target segments’ employee expectations (Hubschmid, 2012, 56). Hubschmid (2012, 56) explains that people define attractiveness diversely due to their differences in age, gender, educational background and cultural characteristics. Thus, the aforementioned characteristics are not targeted to a specific audience, and therefore can be misleading one way or another.

There are a number of researches in the field of personal psychology that investigates factors influencing how attractive organization is to potential recruits. The key findings show that potential recruits are most likely to apply for a job at a particular organization if it has a positive reputation. Hence, the greater a company’s reputation, the more attractive it tends to be perceived by the candidates (Edwards, 2010, 8-10). When it comes to the employer brand reputation, it can be defined as the most commonly held associations for a company as an employer. Most companies can have a mix of positive, negative or neutral associations (Mosley, 2014).

Cable and Graham (2000), as summarized by Edwards (2010, 8) also found evidence that profitability is a central factor predicting job seekers perceptions of a company's reputation. However, this factor is applicable only to profit making companies. Thus, any information that demonstrates company success would also have a positive impact on how attractive the company is seen. Additionally, Turban and Greening (1996), as summarized by Edwards, (2010, 8) found that profitability and success are not the only important factors influencing the organization attractiveness. According to their study, when companies were rated higher on a social responsible features they tend to be perceived as more attractive to potential recruits. Social responsible features can be employer relations, environmental policies, product quality, etc.

Advertising and promoting material can have a positive impact on how favourable potential recruits may view a company and the probability to apply for a job there. For instance, students tend to have more favourable attributes towards companies that sponsor events at their universities (Edwards, 2010, 9). All in all, in order to succeed in making the organization more attractive, any specific information that presents the company's employment offering associated with particular jobs is likely to require a close connection with a general increase in corporate advertising.

Employee engagement

Nowadays people have more of a choice. Employees choose whether or not to be engaged, and employers need to find out their unique engagement triggers (Roesethorn, 2009, 36). The balance of power has shifted from an employer to employee, forcing leaders to learn how to build the organization that engages employees as passionate and creative contributors. The Corporate Leadership Council claims that employee retention occurs when employees believe that there is something in it for them, they believe in what they do, their team and their organization (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004).

Since there are many versions of the employee engagement definition, Resethorn (2009, 36-37) highlighted three dimensions, which have common elements that the most academics agree on:

- The emotional or affective dimension. What do employees feel about a company? Are they proud to work for the company? Would they recommend the company to friends or family as a preferred place to work for?
- The cognitive dimension. Do employees believe in the vision, business strategy and objectives? Do they support the company's values?
- The behavioural or physical dimension. How do employees behave? Are they willing to stay in the company and go beyond the employment contractual agreement?

In other words, when employees believe in company's vision and business strategy and are proud to work for the company, that is what drives the willingness to stay (Rosethorn, 2009, 36-37). On the basis of the above, it can be also concluded that engaged employees are emotionally attached to their organization and involved in their job with enthusiasm for the success of their employer. They care about the future of the company and are willing to make efforts to ensure that the organization succeeds.

Rosethorn (2009, 69) provides an engagement model with four key components, which include: corporate reputation & brands, rewards & recognition, culture & environment, and opportunity. It is important to balance of all four elements in order to have a proper employee engagement. Rosethorn (2009, 69) also suggests that there is a positive correlation between understanding how an employee's day-to-day job contributes to the business strategy and increased employee engagement



Figure 4 Key components of employee engagement (Rosethorn 2009, 69)

More recent employee engagement models consist of 5 major elements working together to build a compelling organization. For instance, Bersin (2015) in Deloitte Review Issue 16 presents the following five simple elements, which drive employee engagement and these are meaning work, hands-on management, positive work environment, growth opportunity and trust in leadership.

1. Meaningful work: employees need to feel like what they are doing matters

The most important part of employee engagement is to make sure that jobs are meaningful and people have the autonomy and decision-making power to succeed. Researches also show that meaningful work takes place in small teams. This makes a team more mobile and brings decision-making closer to the line. Engaged employees need time to think, create and rest. Overworked people tend to produce lower quality output and they actually get less done. Thus, giving people time lets them to relax, gather their thoughts and perform better (Bersin, 2015).

2. Supportive management: management can enforce the company's engagement model

The second element is a great management. Investment in management practices has a large impact on engagement, performance, and retention. Goal setting can be challenging. High-performing managers create simple goals; make sure they are clear and transparent. When employees have clearly defined goals and shared freely, everyone feels more comfortable and more work gets done. Coaching culture is another practices that drives engagement, which correlates with business performance and employee retention. Another important aspect is that companies with a high level of employee engagement focus on developing great leaders, giving leaders the coaching they need.

3. Positive work environment: employees spend a lot of time in their work space, they need to feel comfortable there

Open, flexible and humanistic workplaces have a major impact on engagement. Modern workspaces give people the flexibility to be together or alone, depending on their tasks. The feeling that we can work when and how we want increases productivity. The second engagement driver here is the continuous recognition that is built through social reward systems. Bersin (2015) highlights that the key to success is to create a social environment where recognition can flow from peer to peer. Highly engaged workplaces are also inclusive and diverse: people want to be heard and welcomed.

4. Growth opportunity: everybody is looking to grow in their position

Employees need to know that they are going to progress in their role and career. There should be development opportunities both formal and informal that allow people learn on the job and find support when they need help. Employees need to feel that they are growing and can take on new assignment or sometimes try something new. Moreover, leaders should be rewarded for development of employees, moving people into the best role, and keeping retention high (Bersin, 2015).

5. Trust in leadership: establish vision, purpose and transparency in leadership

The final element, which impacts employee engagement, is the leadership. One of the leadership practices is to develop and communicate a strong sense of purpose, i.e. leadership should embody the mission and purpose of the company. Another leadership practice is transparency. If employees know what their leaders are doing, it's easier for them to get on the same page. According to Deloitte researches, for Millennial the transparency from leaders rates as among the most important drivers of a company loyalty (Bersin, 2015). Third, leaders should continuously invest in people. High-engagement companies' management spend money in leaning, regular meet with teams and provide feedback. Last but not least, inspiring leaders are able to convey company vision more effectively, translating the business strategy into meaningful concept.

As literature shows, employee engagement is closely linked with the organizational performance outcomes. Engagement can improve productivity and effectiveness at work, because engaged employees enjoy their work and are more innovative at workplace. For managers, work of employee engagement starts at day one through effective recruitment and orientation program. Managers should enhance two-way communication, ensure that employees have all the resources they need to do their job, give appropriate training to increase their knowledge and skill.

It is also substantial to establish a reward system, when job is rewarded through various financial and non-financial incentives. A distinctive corporate culture should be also built to encourage hard work and keeps success stories alive as well as develop a strong performance management system. It should held managers and employees accountable for the behaviour they bring to the workplace.

3 Employer brand communication

Communication plays an important role in shaping current and potential employees' understanding and perceptions of the employer branding. As it was discussed in chapter 2.1 employer branding can be seen as a three-step process, which includes the value proposition, external marketing and internal marketing. The last two aspects are significant for attracting the target audience and developing a workforce that is committed to the companies' values and goals.

In many companies the employer brand marketing is seen as an external activity that helps to build reputation and recruit talents. However, according to Mosley (2014, 214), there are vital advantages in extending the employer branding internally. The major difference between external and internal marketing is that the former is aimed at people who have limited experience of the company, whereas the audience for internal communication experience an everyday reality of the company (Mosley, 2014, 2014).

When launching a new or refreshed employer value proposition, a clear communication plan should be defined, e.g. setting overall objectives, segmenting target audiences and identifying their preferences. The primary objectives should be divided into internal and external goals, as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Communication objectives (Mosley 2014, 202)

Internally	Externally
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing awareness of the employer brand promise • Supporting the roll-out of new corporate brand/mission and values • Improving levels of employee engagement and retention • Clarifying the consequences if organizational change • Driving higher level of proactive advocacy and referral. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising overall awareness of your employer brand • Refreshing and reinforcing existing brand perceptions • Addressing misperceptions • Driving for higher quality or higher volume recruitment

As it is seen in Table 1, external and internal marketing of the employer brand have different purposes. However, the interaction between these two is central. On the other hand, if internal and external marketing are mismatched, this can be very confusing, and it threatens employees' perceptions of the company's integrity, for example, they are told one thing by management, but observe different messages sent to the public.

In both external and internal communication the company should consider the proper channels of communication. The choice of channels in the external communication mainly depends on the desired target group. In the internal communication it is important to consider how to communicate at all companies' levels, and how it influences the organisational culture and shapes the organisational identity of the current employees.

The specific characteristics of internal and external marketing will be further described in chapters 3.1 and 3.2.

3.1 Internal marketing

Mosley and Barrow (2014, 132, 139) emphasize one specific aspect, when it comes to internal communication - is how to get people engaged with a new set of messages and ideas. To promote an internal commitment, it is important to establish both a strong rationale understanding and emotional engagement of employees. Thus, the first principle of engagement requires active leadership. The reason for this is that internal communication of the employer brand is most luckily to engage employees if it's proactively led from the top and supported by the HR community. According to Mosley (2014, 223), earning the reputation for being an employer of choice and delivering a positive employee experience needs to be a personal mission of the CEO.

When introducing the employer brand to employees, clarity and focus of the communication is a key. To adopt an employer brand the employees first need to un-

derstand the context in which it is being introduced. Why is it being launched now? What will it help the business to do? And what's in it for them? It is important that the employees easily understand the relevance of the brand to the employment experience. In this way, they are most likely to accept the company's brand message if they experience the values for themselves. For instance, in case of a major external brand re-launch, where the role of the employer brand is to support the behavior change necessary to deliver the new brand promise, people will be more willing to play their role in shaping a new customer brand experience, if they experience similar values and benefits themselves as employees (Mosley, 2014, 220).

Mosley (2014, 223-224) also highlights an important difference between emotional engagement and commitment in the context of internal communication. Engagement can be earned with brand promises, whereas longer-term commitment can only be earned if that brand promises are substantiated. It means that people will believe in brand messages and begin to change their behaviors only if they see sensible evidences from the top that the brand proposition and values are being integrated, changing the way in which processes are run and important decisions are taken.

In addition to substantiation of the brand promises, the brand message should be consistent in order to build trust and credibility in employer brand. The consistency must be observed across all internal communications and also between internal and external communication. The external communication can send powerful messages to the employees about what company they work for. Thus, it is important to make sure employees feel that the employer brand communication is credible before it's over-promised to new recruits or customers (Mosley, 2014, 225-226).

The truth is that people always pay more attention to what is done than what is said. Therefore companies should strive to symbolize their intention through tangible actions. The danger with most internal communication campaigns is that they come and go without really changing much. As a result, most employees tend to be cynical about the next 'big initiative' and underwhelmed in terms of inspiration and engagement (Mosley, 2014, 221).

3.2 External marketing

Following the development of the value proposition, companies need to market their value proposition to its target potential employees by selecting communication channels and developing communication ideas. These communication ideas and concepts should have the greatest possible impact on the target groups and set the company apart from the competition.

In a technology-driven age, where information is widely accessible, transparency is valued. Millennial job seekers are digitally savvy and spend several hours a day on social media, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. They research an employer online before deciding to apply, and if there is not enough information to convince them, they will simply switch to another opportunity. The external marketing world is basically driven by the Internet access, social media and smart mobile devices. Thus, it becomes essential for companies to invest into the process of establishing a Millennial-friendly culture and embedding it into the digital landscape.

Career websites remain the most preferred source of information on potential employers, as it's one of the first places potential candidates will come into direct contact with the companies. According to Universum benchmark survey (2014), career websites are likely to have their central role in employer branding marketing in the future too, but it requires significant investments to remain predominant. People are more attracted by video content, which means that if the career website is text heavy, it is less effective in engagement potential employees. The most common use of video on career websites is the video employee profile, as it more effectively conveys information than a text-based profile (Mosley, 2014, 168). Another important feature is that websites should be mobile-friendly or have 'responsive web design', because many active job seekers use their mobile to find jobs.

LinkedIn has become a vital component within the recruitment industry in recent years. Establishing a LinkedIn profile has now become standard practice in professional area. Facebook is considered to have more global members and greater strength in promoting the employer brand image than LinkedIn. However, it less

effective overall in driving hires. Whereas, LinkedIn can be used at any stage of the recruitment funnel, including employer brand awareness, posting jobs, searching for candidates, contacting candidates. Twitter, like Facebook, is seen as having a lower hire impact than LinkedIn, but it is also more highly used for promoting the employer brand, generating the referrals, etc. (Mosley, 2014,180). While these represent the most significant recruitment media, there are many others to consider, e.g. YouTube, Google+ and Pinterest or Instagram.

Employer referral has always been a great source of hire. People are able to share relevant job vacancies with their social and professional contacts. There have been several studies concluding that employee referral is the most efficient recruitment channel, which provides the highest quality candidates at the lowest cost per hire. Therefore, it should be a central component in every company's employer branding marketing plan. By establishing and promoting an employee referral program within the company, it encourages the current employees to think about positives of working for the company and spread the word to their network. As known, nobody is more influential, when it comes to communicating the company's brand than the employees themselves (Pratt, 2016).

Brand Ambassador is another concept, which became popular for promoting the company brand, while personifying the corporate identity. Naturally, all employees can be viewed as brand ambassadors, who share their stories about company culture and promoting the employment experience (in person or via social media channels) on a daily basis. However, in order to have employees serving as advocates for a company, it needs to be ensured they feel connected to the organization's mission, vision and values. Allowing employees to share what inspires them and makes their employment experience exceptional, not only strengthens their own engagement, but can also boost talent attraction activities (Schooling, 2015).

Most leading employers try to reach out to potential candidates earlier in their academic years to build more continual relationships, thus they are building deeper relationships with top ranked universities and student organizations. Students are attracted to companies with a high level of contact, i.e. companies that attend events, fund scholarships and arrange career fairs (Mosley, 182-184). Based on

student surveys, they prefer to have personal contact and be introduced to an employer face-to-face, as they also like to hear about the employer through people already working for the company, i.e. brand ambassadors. On the other hand, remote college recruiting is another trend, which is applied to extend talent net to a wider range of universities. The effectiveness of remote recruiting has been enhanced by use of video interviewing, when companies can potentially identify, interview and hire candidates without ever being in the university campus.

4 Employer branding for Generation Y

Due to demographic changes and labour market shortages, the demand and therefore the competition for recruiting top graduates into the workforce increases (Hubschmid, 2013). To compete for future talented graduates, employers need to be aware of the characteristics of their generation (Generation Y), which underlines the importance of exploring the employment expectations of potential graduate entrants.

The oldest of this generation are already integrated into the workforce and many are still on internship. They challenge companies with their different attitudes, behaviours and expectations towards their employers (Hubschmit, 2013). Generation Y is defined by the intensive use of digital technology. Technological achievements such as the Internet, computers, and mobile phones are taken for granted. Generation Y is often referred to as “digital natives” or “techno-savy”. The usage of social network is a common way to stay in touch with friends across the world. As a result, a recruitment process for companies needs to be adapted dramatically.

4.1 Characteristics of Generation Y

Tapscott (2009, 160) identifies eight characteristics that describe Generation Y, as follows: Freedom, Customisation, Scrutiny, Integrity, Collaboration, Entertainment, Speed and Innovation. These characteristics will be further discussed in this chapter.

Freedom is expressed in the fact that Generation Y employees like to choose where and when to work. They want to keep balance between work and personal life. Many of them reject standard working hours, besides they want to be able to work outside of the office. A work/life balance is one of the most discussed topics in connection with Generation Y's expectations. The importance of reasonable work/life balance is caused by Generation Y's personal observations. Some studies show that this generation has seen their parents spending more time working hard than enjoying life, only to be laid off by the organization at next best occasion (Ng and Schweitzer and Lyons 2010, 282). Other studies suggest that the focus

on work/life balance is accompanied by a greater orientation towards family in terms of their close relationships with their parents (Hershatte and Epstein 2010, 219). A good way for companies to attract Generation Y is to offer contracts that include flexible working hours, shift work or on-call. Generation Y expects to be judged on their performance rather than on time spent at the office.

Another key factor to Generation Y that has been frequently mentioned is the desire for recognition and rapid advancement opportunities, which is also associated with prestige and status. Their environment tells them from a young age how special they are. Some authors say that Generation Y has been overwhelmed with “gold medals” in their childhood for almost everything and this has resulted in a strong demand for approval and acknowledgment. It could also mean that they seek for guidance and managerial support. However, they are considered to be independent and they want a certain degree of flexibility in accomplishing their tasks. Martin (2005) describes Generation Y as the most entrepreneurial generation to date, with many members already starting up a business while still in college.

When it comes to salary and benefits, researchers show different findings. Some researchers have pointed out that Generation Y has extremely high expectations towards salary as they view salary as direct feedback on the result they achieve (Tapscott, 2009, 160). Yet others show that Generation Y has rather realistic expectations towards their salaries in their first job after graduation. They place greater importance on the intrinsic values of a particular job (Ng and Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010, 282). This can be associated with the fact that they seek meaningful and interesting work. Hewlett et al. (2009) also found six types of rewards that were valued more than monetary compensation. These are: “high-quality colleagues, flexible work arrangements, prospects for advancement, recognition from management or organization, advancement and promotion and access to new experiences and challenges”.

Customisation refers to the fact that Gen Y appreciates having the things their way and they want to be perceived as individuals. If companies are able to create highly customized job descriptions, work systems, compensation plans or development

opportunities among other things, they are more likely to keep Generation Y employees in the company (Tapscott, 2009, 161).

Scrutiny and integrity are inseparable. Generation Y defines integrity as being honest, transparent and considerate. Therefore, they appreciate companies that communicate openly and act transparently. In fact, they are very sceptical and check out many companies' related details before they accept a job offer (Tapscott, 2009, 161-162). The status, hierarchy, or power within a company is not so important for Generation Y.

Social aspect of work is another item that has been discussed in connection with Generation Y. The social environment can serve as a source of motivation for Generation Y employees (Twenge et al., 2010, 205). Collaboration and team efforts are the ways they want to get things done. Generation Y appreciates a friendly work environment. This also implies that the work itself should be fun. They like to have ways to cool off, take break, and then go back to work and achieve results (Tapscott, 2009, 165).

It should be noted that Generation Y is less loyal towards their employers. If they do not feel satisfied with their current situations, they will change working places without doubt (Ng and Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010, 282). Therefore, companies have to engage in activities that strengthen the connection with Generation Y employees in terms of employee satisfaction. It also applies to organizations' promises. If an organization does not fulfill any previously made promises, Generation Y employees most likely leave the company. Another factor that may influence a Generation Y loyalty is corporate social responsibility and commitment to diversity. Therefore, organizations should consider their social responsibilities in order to strengthen Generation Y's loyalty towards them (Ng and Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010, 289).

Generation Y needs speed in almost every aspect of their lives. If bureaucracy rules the company and, for example, it takes a long time until a recruitment decision is made, Generation Y employees are likely to leave the company soon. A hallmark of Generation Y culture is innovation. Innovation is a key to engage Gen-

eration Y. Knowing how they can contribute to the company's success or make a difference is what Generation Y strives for in a job.

Generation Y seems to become a wave that will break the norms. Flexibility, quick learning skills, technological intelligence, seeking the common good is the potential of Generation Y. Members of Generation Y has high expectations of themselves, as well as of their employees (Armour, 2005). Generation Y also expects their supervisors to be engaged in their development and to be clear and honest managers. They want to receive responsibility from the start and want goals to work towards (Armour, 2005). These expectations should not be ignored by modern organizations, but brought up and explored. Therefore, leaders should be able (Axten, 2015, 50-54):

- To create an attractive and compelling organizational vision;
- To inspire people to get committed and engaged to their implementation;
- To focus on effective communication and to actively listen to their employees;
- To keep job challenging and provide training and growth opportunities;
- To create an environment that cherishes creativity.
- To accept different opinions, constructive criticism and to be open-minded;
- To learn new things, to adapt to changes and to learn from mistakes.

4.2 Attraction of Generation Y employees

Individuals within Generation Y tend to be very confident, team-oriented and achieving. Generation Y's personal traits shape their employee expectations, some of which include:

- Work-life balance: work in order to live a decent life
- Fun at work: work needs to be fun, and stressful tasks need to be rewarded
- Speed and innovation: the less bureaucracy, the better
- Rapid advancement opportunities: career development is top priority

- Meaningful work: work needs to have a purpose.

Rosethorn (2009, 43) adds that the aforementioned employee expectations are also a part of the new rules of employee engagement for Generation Y and are critical to understand and manage successful employer brands.

Dyhre and Parment (2009, 92) touch up on the importance of effective communication to Generation Y. Due to the fact that Generation Y has grown up with transparent and quick communication, they tend to take it for granted. Therefore, the Gen Y expects organizations to have smooth and transparent communication with very little policies (Dyhre and Parment, 2009, 92).

Based on student surveys, students prefer high level of personal contact, for example, being introduced to an employer face-to-face at an event or career fair. Students like to hear about an employer through people already working for the company, if not directly then via videos on the company websites. Students are attracted to companies with high level of contact, such as companies that attend events, fund scholarships and arrange speakers for classes (Cable and Turban, 2003), as summarized by Edwards (2010, 9).

Generation Y is very technology oriented and therefore company websites are important information gathering points. Dyhre and Parment (2009, 72, 101) stated that printed media is still a popular channel, however it may be difficult to choose the right media for the targeted audience. Cable and Turban (2003), as summarized by Edwards (2010, 9) suggest that prospective employees use websites to collect data about an organization, which in return forms their impression of the firm and their belief of whether they will fit in the firm. Therefore, corporate websites and recruitment sites are important to keep up to date and target the intended audience, such as business students.

Social media is also a popular communication tool. HRM.ru carried out a study in 2011, which revealed that LinkedIn and Facebook represent the most popular online networks for graduates when searching for information on potential employers (Hubschmid, 2012, 79).

5 Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods and data collection approach. To review the objectives, please refer to chapter 1. The thesis is focusing on the Company's employer branding practices with regard to collaboration and attraction of engineering students – the current state and suggestions for bringing the traditional methods of collaboration to next level to be more interesting for target students.

5.1 Research methods and research design

Research can be defined as a process of investigation, gathering and detailed study of materials using scientific methods. According to Saunders et al. (2009, 5), “research is something that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge”. A research process itself consists of the important activities, such as to identify a research problem; to determine research design and research method; to collect and analyze data. Research method, as one of the important sections, can be considered as “tool” which helps to collect data and arrive at solution or find the answers.

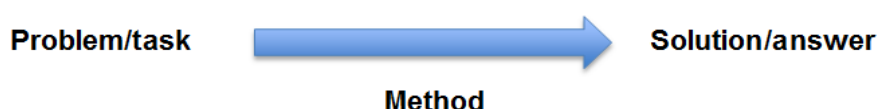


Figure 5 Role of methods (Sunders et al., 2009, 418)

Research methods in scientific and nonscientific fields are often divided into two main types: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative method is based on the valuation or measurement of quantity or amount. The result of this research is a number or a set of numbers that are presented in tables and graphs. Quantitative data, as numerical data, can be quantified and need to be processed and analysed. Analysis techniques such as graphs, charts and statistics allow examining and describing the data. It can range from simple counts to more complex data such as test

scores, prices or rental costs (Saunders et al., 2009, 418).

Qualitative approach is concerned with subjective assessment of opinions and behavior that is gathering, analyzing and interpreting data by observing what people say. Qualitative data refers to all non-numeric data that have not been qualified. It can range from a short list of responses to open-ended questions in questionnaire to more complex data such as transcripts of interviews (Saunders et al., 2009, 480).

In order to provide recommendations to Company a qualitative data collection method is applied. This method is explorative, informative and it allows pursuing different questions and concepts during the interview (Stevan J, et al., 2015). Compared to the quantitative method, the qualitative method is suitable for the workshop and interviews as the collected data is based on meanings expressed through words instead of numbers. Qualitative research is allowing respondents to express their opinions and feelings.

Figure 6 below is an illustration of the research design, which indicates the focus, scope and research method applied.

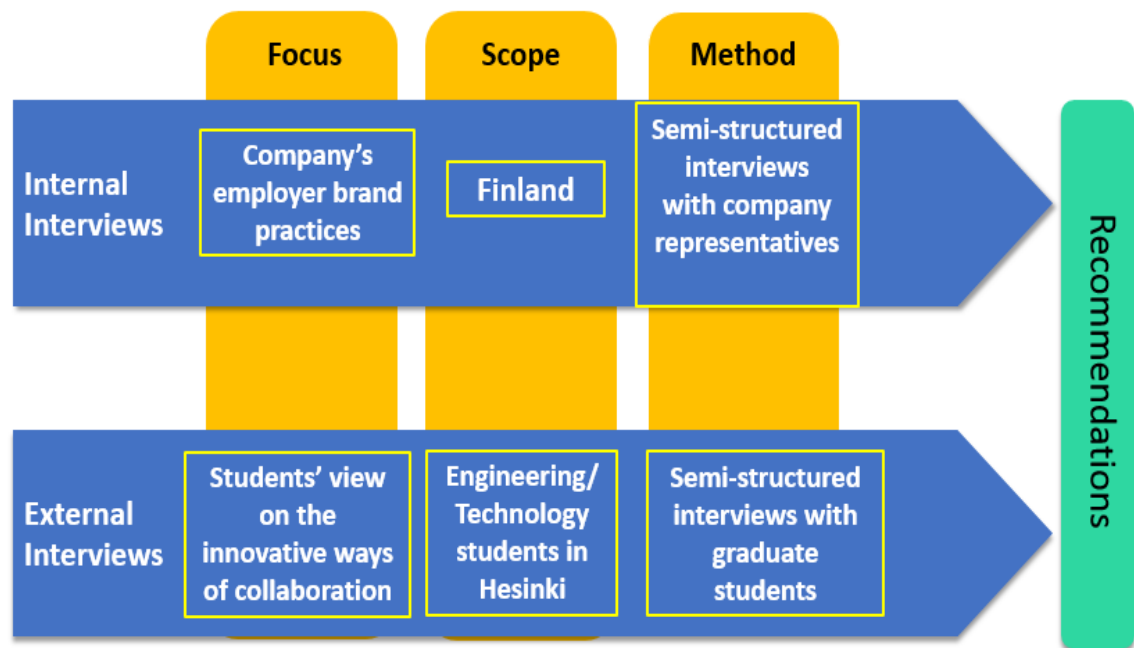


Figure 6 Research Design

The research design is built on the qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with the company's representatives (i.e. internal interviews) and graduate students from Aalto University School of Engineering (i.e. external interviews). Internal interviews were conducted with HR and Communications specialists as well as Businesses representatives. Since during the interviews it has been determined that Helsinki is the most critical area, when it comes to students attraction, external interviews' scope includes only engineering students in Helsinki. Recommendations for Company based on the result gained through the internal and external interviews. Hence, no additional data to analyze was gathered.

5.2 Data collection

5.2.1 Qualitative Company interviews

The main purpose of the internal interviews was to understand the current employer brand practices of Company, in particular what traditional methods of collaboration with Engineering students are used. The interviews were conducted as

a face-to-face meeting with HR Specialists from the Global Resourcing & Employer branding department, Culture & People department, and Director of Communications. Additionally, a few interviews were arranged with the business representatives to understand the Business needs and its view on the company's employer brand, taking into consideration an on-going digital transformation.

Interviews took place at the case company's headquarters in Helsinki and in Vaa-sa office. The main goal was to collect information on the Company's current employer branding practices and actions in promoting its employer brand to Engineering students in Finland. Interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. The analysis and results of interviews are reported in Chapter 7.

The semi-structured interview framework consisted of 19 questions in total. The actual interview framework can be found in Appendix 1. The questions were divided into 6 themes, which are Employer branding, Employer brand image, Employer brand communication, Employer branding to Engineering students, Employee value proposition, Employer brand attractiveness and measurements. Employee value proposition theme was divided into two parts, depending on whether Company has a clearly defined EVP or not. If the answer is "Yes", then the next questions should clarify how EVP is defined, how it is communicated to the employees and externally, etc. If the answer is "No", then the next questions are about building and segmentation of the company's EVP. All themes and questions are based on the theoretical concepts related to employer branding from Chapter 2, 3 and 4, as show in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Interview questions derived from theory

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Chapter number</i>
<i>Theme 1 Employer branding</i>	Chapter 2.1 and 2.2
<i>Theme 2 Employer brand image</i>	Chapter 2.2.3
<i>Theme 3 Employer brand communication</i>	Chapter 3.1, 3.2
<i>Theme 4 Employee value proposition</i>	Chapter 2.2.1
<i>Theme 5 Employer branding to engineering students</i>	Chapter 4.1 and 4.2
<i>Theme 6 Employer brand attractiveness and measurements</i>	Chapter 2.2.2 and 2.2.3

5.2.2 Qualitative students interviews

The qualitative interviews were conducted with the graduate students from Aalto University School of Engineering. The main purpose of the interviews was to explore the students' opinion about Company's Innovation Node established at Aalto University Campus to increase collaborative activities with students. Additionally, the aim was to determine the current students' perceptions of Company as an employer.

The semi-structured interview framework consisted of 7 questions. In total, I conducted 4 phone interviews and 1 face-to-face interview. 4 students were from School of Engineering, Mechanical Engineering department with Product Development as their major. 1 student was from School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Among selected students, 1 had the role of a Project manager and the rest were team members. The students were chosen based on the projects' report from and PDP/IBDM courses conducted in 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 periods. Students were reached out either through email or Facebook (which happened to be the most effective way).

The interview questions determined whether the respondents were familiar with Company before the project participation and what has influenced their decision to choose Company's topic; whether their perceptions of the company as an employer has changed afterwards. Another part of questions was dedicated to the Innovation Node and students' feedback about it functioning. The last question asked student to share their thoughts on how the traditional methods of collaboration, such as recruitment fairs, case events, company visits can be brought to the next level and become more interesting for students.

Some notes were taken during the interviews that served to facilitate interpretation at the time of data analyses. The actual interview questions can be found in Appendix 2. The analysis and results of interviews are reported in Chapter 7.

The major 6 categories that emerged are Matchmaking and team formation, Company Introduction, Mentoring, Innovation Node facility, Location, Students' suggestions, as shown in Table 3. Each theme that emerged from the data is discussed and supported with examples of actual data.

Table 3 Themes derived from the interview framework questions

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Chapter number</i>
<i>Theme 1 Matchmaking and team formation</i>	Q1, Q2, Q3
<i>Theme 2 Company Introduction</i>	Q1, Q3
<i>Theme 3 Mentoring</i>	Q5
<i>Theme 4 Innovation Node facility</i>	Q4, Q6
<i>Theme 5 Location</i>	Q6
<i>Theme 6 Students' suggestions</i>	Q7

5.2.3 Recommendations to the case company

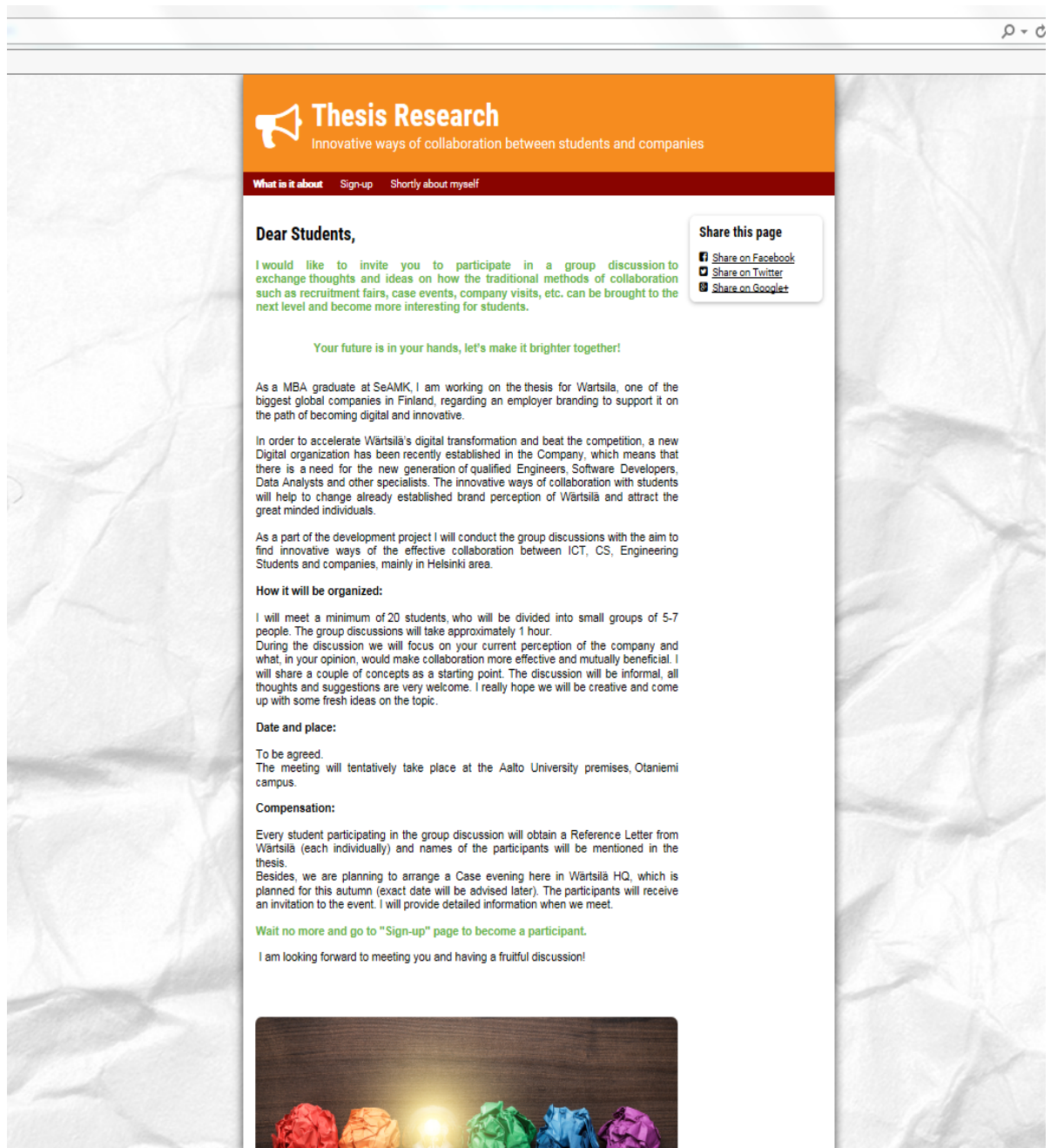
As shown in the research design Figure 6, recommendations are based on theory analysis and interviews findings. No additional data collection was performed for this part. The results from internal and external interviews provide needed information in order to make conclusions. In addition to findings from the interviews, the theoretical framework of employer branding and characteristics of Generation Y is used as a basis for providing recommendations to the case company. All in all, the recommendations are the core objectives of this thesis; therefore Chapter 7 is entirely dedicated to it.

5.3 Challenges in the research process

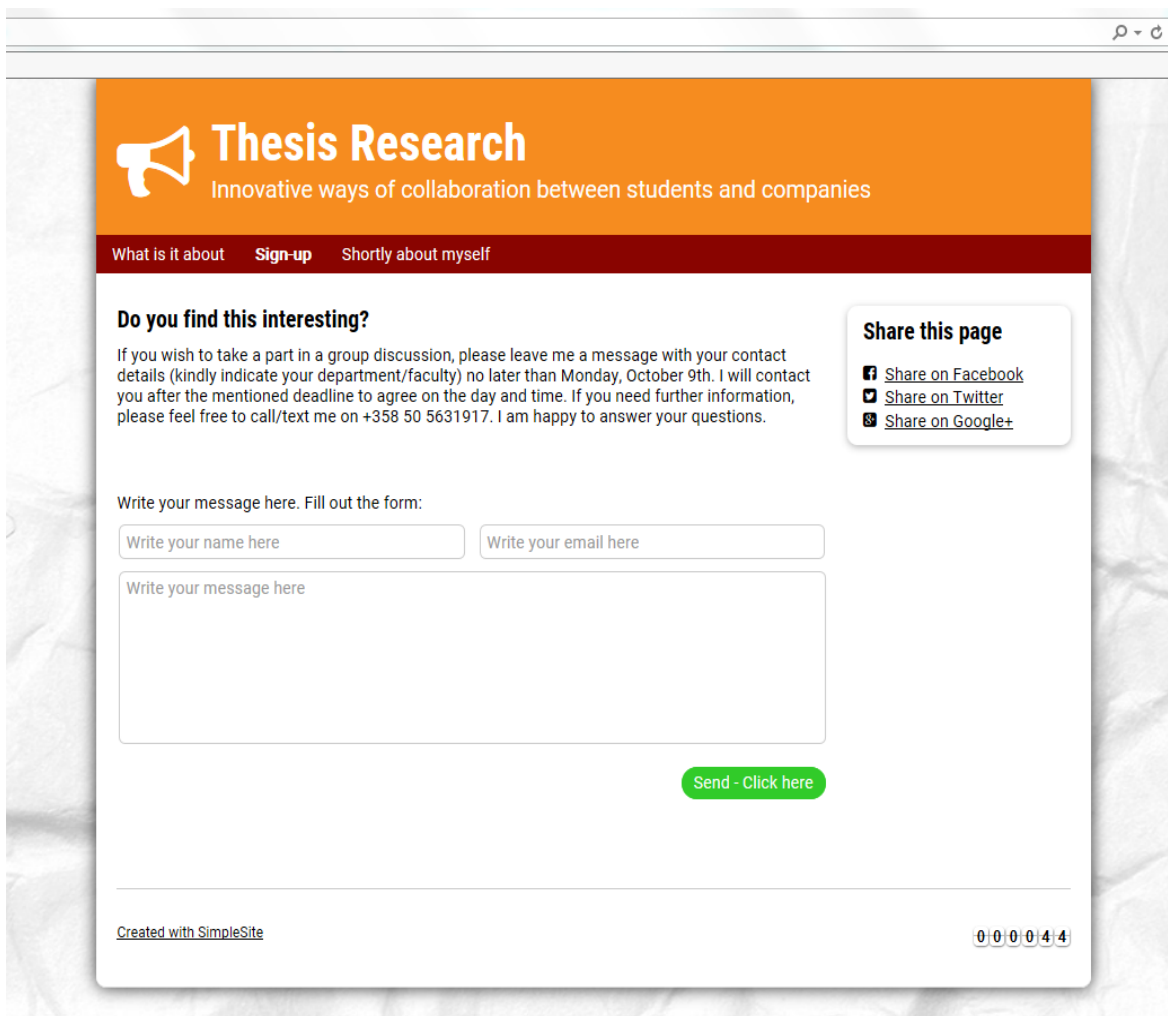
The initial idea was to arrange group discussions with students from Aalto University School of Engineering to brainstorm new ideas on how to increase collaboration between students and Company. Also, to come up with some innovative ways of collaboration that would be mutually beneficial. For group discussions I planned to have at least 20 students, who would have been divided into 4 smaller groups.

In order to collect the needed amount of students, I contacted students' guilds from the different departments. The invitation email was added to the mailing list of 7 departments, on my request. Compensation for the group discussion participation was also mentioned in the invitation. However, I received only 3 replies, though the deadline was extended twice.

My second attempt was based on placing a link to my web page into a newsletter, which is sent out to students 4-6 times per year. The web page contained information on my research and about myself, some practical aspects and also a tab, where students could sign up for group discussions. The webpage's screenshot can be seen from Picture 1 and 2 below. However, this attempt was unsuccessful too. There were 2 more students that showed their interest. Later, I learned that students are not actively reacting to such invitations due to tight time schedule at school. Besides, they may be approached by many other companies or researchers at the same time.



Picture 1 Web page. Invitation letter tab



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a page titled "Thesis Research" with the tagline "Innovative ways of collaboration between students and companies". The page has an orange header and a dark red navigation bar with links: "What is it about", "Sign-up", and "Shortly about myself". The "Sign-up" link is highlighted. The main content area is titled "Do you find this interesting?" and contains a paragraph of text. To the right, there is a "Share this page" box with links to Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Below the text, there is a form with three input fields: "Write your name here", "Write your email here", and a larger "Write your message here" text area. A green "Send - Click here" button is positioned below the form. At the bottom left, it says "Created with SimpleSite", and at the bottom right, there is a digital clock showing "0:0:0:0:4:4".

Thesis Research
Innovative ways of collaboration between students and companies

What is it about **Sign-up** Shortly about myself

Do you find this interesting?

If you wish to take a part in a group discussion, please leave me a message with your contact details (kindly indicate your department/faculty) no later than Monday, October 9th. I will contact you after the mentioned deadline to agree on the day and time. If you need further information, please feel free to call/text me on +358 50 5631917. I am happy to answer your questions.

Share this page

- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Google+](#)

Write your message here. Fill out the form:

Write your name here Write your email here

Write your message here

[Send - Click here](#)

Created with SimpleSite 0:0:0:0:4:4

Picture 2 Web page. Sign-up tab

In order to find more successful way to get students involved into the research, I arranged a meeting with one of the professors at University Campus. During the discussion we came to a common opinion that there are a lot of different events arranged by companies throughout the year in Helsinki. Students therefore have plenty of options to choose from and they do not grab at any popping up opportunity. I also learned that in many cases, students find companies for their diploma work or internship with the help of University. Professors/tutors can simply inform what companies have vacancies at the moment. When it comes to events or company visits, all arrangements are usually done via student's guilds. In general, communication between universities and companies is already on a good level.

We also touched on the topic of Design factory and Open Innovation House, which are located at University Campus at Otaniemi. Company has the Innovation node established there and has been engaged in joint Product Development projects with University. One could say that it is one of the best innovative ways of collaboration that companies could use. However, the Innovation Node has been closed last year due to certain reasons. The professor's suggestion was to consider the Innovation Node idea from the different point of view. In terms of employer branding, the main goal of companies is to find talents and possibly recruit them in the future. The final product is not the main point, as the process itself is more important. This is how students obtain practical experience, learn something new, get contacts, and companies, in turn, choose the best talents.

Due to the above observations, I have decided to investigate further Company's Innovation Node and to collect feedback from the students who participated in the projects. The idea was supported by the case company's business representatives. Since, in their opinion, this is an excellent way to change the employer brand of Company. I believe that thoughts and feelings shared by students can be used as the company benefit.

6 Results

The purposes of the research is to analyze the current employer branding practices of the case company; and to provide recommendations regarding the innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students in Helsinki in order to change already established brand perceptions of Company. The research results are presented and analysed from the aforementioned qualitative interviews. As this study is exploratory in nature, qualitative interviews and analysis fit the purpose.

Chapter 6.1 presents findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the Company's employees. It gives the internal point of view on the current employer brand in general and actions that Company has taken to influence its employer brand image among Engineering students. The external interviews' findings, presented in chapter 6.2, give some insight into students' opinion on Company's Innovation Node established at Aalto University Campus, as an innovative way of collaboration; and whether it influenced their perception of the company as a potential employer.

Results are divided into themes from the research frameworks. Research findings are analyzed, described and interpreted. For a better understanding of research design please check Figure 6 in chapter 5.

6.1 Qualitative interviews on the current employer branding practices

The interview framework was created based on the theoretical framework of Chapter 2, 3 and 4, which describes various concepts and elements of employer branding. The results of the company's interviews are outlined and interpreted below. There will be also discussed employer brand challenges that Company is facing on global and local scale. The questions were divided into 6 themes, which are Employer branding, Employer brand image, Employer brand communication, Em-

ployer branding to Engineering students, Employee value proposition, Employer brand attraction and measurements.

Employer branding

At the time of research interviews, Company's global employer branding practices were at an early development stage. In May 2014, a new department of Global Resourcing and Employer Branding was established in order to boost the company's employer brand on a global scale. Even though the department has a formal responsibility for employer branding activities, according to the interviewees, an employer brand in general is something that cannot be handled only by the Human Resources team. The involvement of other departments is therefore required too. In his book Richard Mosley (2014) writes that there are many benefits to be gained from collaboration between Human Recourses, Marketing and Communication departments, because all these functions have skills and capabilities of delivering certain elements of the employer brand.

Theoretically, a company should specify the main functions that its employer brand focuses on, for example, attracting top talent, improving retention, minimizing a turnover or improving employee engagement. Since Company has only recently started building a global employer brand; it does not single out one specific function, but keep focus on all of them. According to the interviewees, the most difficult challenge in this respect is to build a compelling employer brand, so that Company would be known globally as a good organization to work for. Surely, the company's employer branding needs to be localized to overcome cultural barriers, as one size does not fit one. However, the core does not change in different places. Thus, there should be developed and communicated one clear message in order to get more consistency globally (Mosley, 2014).

In Finland, the employer branding activities had been already going on for many years. Company has built quite unique relationships with universities and schools. However, the talent attraction in a competitive market has always been a challenge. There are an amazing number of well-known Technology companies as well as promising and sexy start-ups in Finland. Company is headquartered in

Helsinki, but the operation businesses and production site are located in Vaasa. It is therefore hard to attract a target audience in other cities of Finland. During the interview, it became clear that despite of extensive actions in influencing the company's employer brand image, Helsinki and Tampere are the most critical areas. Company is not well known or popular among Engineering students/professionals in these cities.

Even though Company is based in Finland and has a very long history, many people still think that it is a heavy metal company, which only manufactures huge engines for ships. In fact, Company has much more than just a "metal and engineering shop", it has many different business lines, for example Energy, Environmental Excellence, Gas Solutions, etc. Nowadays, Company is also transforming into digital smart technology organization. Digital transformation process implies a change of organizational culture, business models, and product and services solutions. Thus, to accelerate a digital transformation at all levels; a big internal campaign has been arranged. Additionally, in 2016 Company acquired a Finnish clean-tech software engineering company. It has been decided that the new-acquired company will keep its own brand for a while, as it is a pioneer in analytics and digital business. Whereas, Company is more known as a bit old-fashioned Engine/Machinery Company.

For the new-acquired company, a challenge related to employer brand has been so that nobody knew about it in Finland. All customers are located somewhere else than Finland, like in USA, UK, Asia. Thus, all marketing efforts had gone abroad. Besides, before the acquisition, it was a startup company, which means that they have not had the possibility to do any big activities on employer branding for financial reasons. Director of Culture and People discovered, "We have always been an interesting company to work at, but we were struggling to find good candidates, especially on the Software Developers side, because of the risk of a small company. After joining Company, it became easier than before to attract our target audience".

People tend to think that it's a safer job working for a larger company as working for a start-up can involve certain risks. It will take some time until the message

comes through to potential candidates, and Company will be known as a modern and digital organization. It requires building a good communication strategy in order to promote the transformation externally, so that it will become sexier for the younger generation as well.

Employer brand image

Company has taken many steps towards influencing its employer brand image. One of the main changes on the external image was an upgrade of the official global web site and Careers page, according to the interviewees. Company's Job Market is a platform where employees can check open vacancies, leave an application as well as get some tips for how to write a good CV. Career websites remain the most preferred source of information on potential employers, as it's one of the first places potential candidates will come into direct contact with the companies. According to Universum student survey (2014), career websites are likely to have their central role in employer branding marketing in the future too, but it requires significant investments to remain predominant.

Company uses various social media channels such as Instagram and Twitter. Through these channels, Company always keeps updated its followers on latest news and events. Open vacancies are often posted on LinkedIn and Facebook. Facebook is also used for the summer trainees' attraction. In a technology-driven age, where information is widely accessible, transparency is valued. Millennial job seekers are digitally savvy and spend several hours a day on social media.

Locally, there is a lot of cooperation work done with universities and schools. It is important to identifying contacts and mapping the competencies needed in the future. Some programmes have been established based on the company's needs. "Energy Week" is one of the programmes, where Company is very actively involved. In a wider perspective, Company is also doing something for children to get them interested in energy and natural sciences. First, to get them studied the right subjects, and then to find more resources for it. Vaasa city has made the Energy education strategy, where Company plays an important role.

Summer Power is one of the effective employer brand practices towards young talents. “Every year, we employ around 500 students in Vaasa, Turku and Helsinki, additionally to diploma workers”, commented Global Resourcing and Employer Branding specialist. Summer internship is a great opportunity for students to get experience in the field of study, by doing a real work and making contacts for the future purposes. Students therefore have better chances to get an employment contract after their graduation from the university.

Company takes part in “Suomen Mentorit” traineeship program, where it offers a 6 months well-paid traineeship to graduated individuals, who do not have yet work experience in their main field of study. Another type of the mentoring program is done on a volunteer basis via www.suomenmentorit.fi. The purpose is the same, i.e. to offer support to newly graduated young people in order to speed up their employment after graduation.

On the recruitment side, Company has been participating in recruitment and professional fairs to find good employees in Finland. Such events are a good opportunity for a company to introduce itself, share some insights and maybe influence an opinion of potential employees on the company. Attracting passive job seekers is another area, where Company is making efforts.

The employer branding activities performed by Company throughout the year are illustrated in Figure 7.

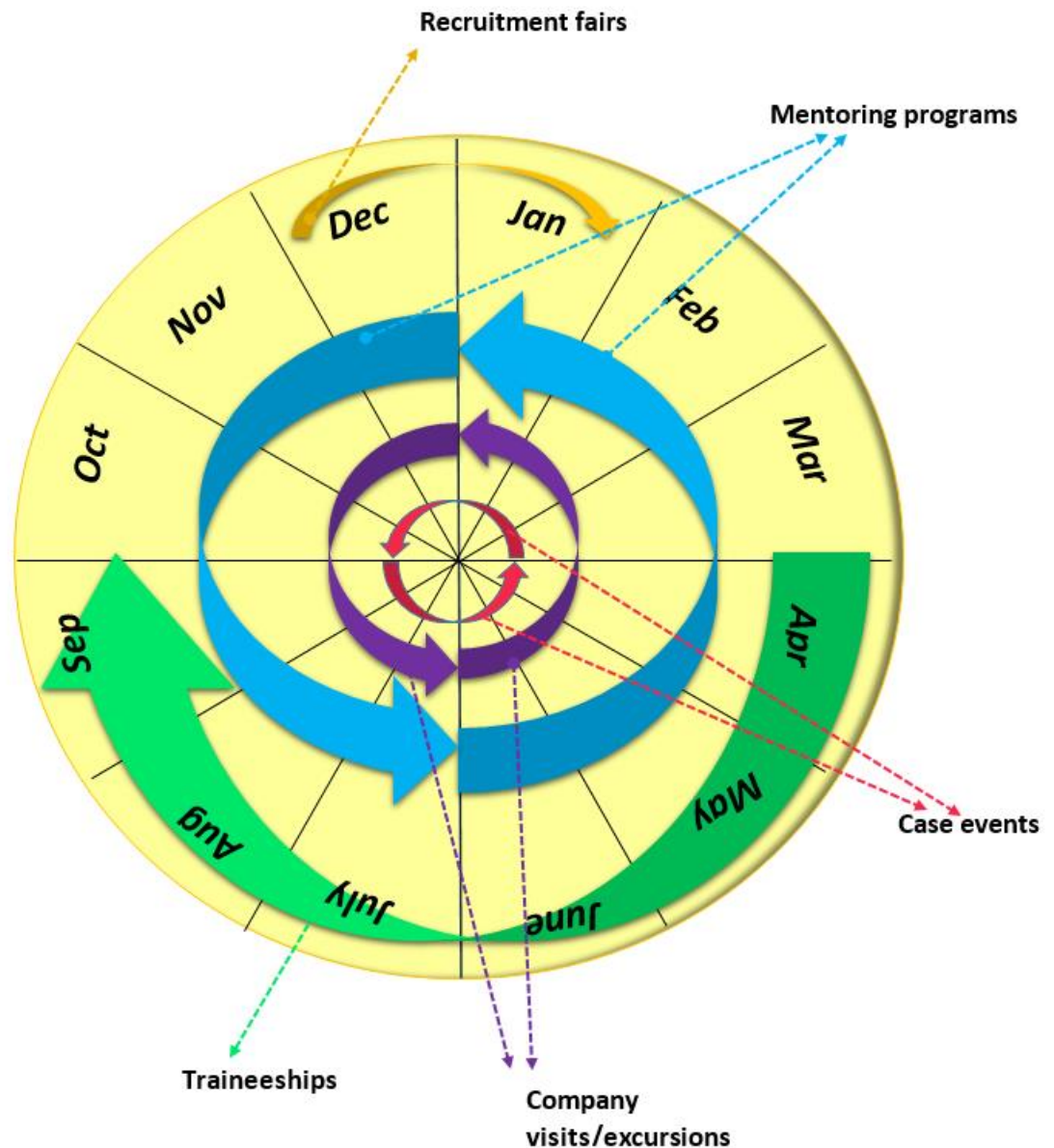


Figure 7 Annual clock: Company's current employer branding activities

Most of the student recruitment fairs are held in December – January. The main locations for the past couple of years were Helsinki, Espoo, Oulu, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa. Case events are handled request by request throughout the year. Company visits and excursions are done throughout the year as well. Mentoring programs start at January, lasting for the full year. Traineeships usually start during spring (March –April) and last for a 4-6 months.

The business representatives have also been asked whether, in their opinion, the company's employer brand has been adjusted to be more attractive for the target audience. A common reply was that looking overall at employer brand, Company is still old fashioned. "It is very difficult to differentiate, especially taking into account presumptions of what company is doing. We should have something really feasible to change these presumptions". Another comment was that, "Year after year, there are some of the big consultancy companies, like Reaktor, Futuris and Vincit earn top rating. However, there are few others, which are very surprising. For example, Osuuspankki was able to reinvent itself and establish digital brand, being a traditional company".

At the moment Company is more focusing on internal branding and internal communications, than doing it for external world. Once the changes have taken place inside the company, especially in the context of digital transformation, the focus should gradually be shift towards shaping the external brand. "It would be generally better to brand us more digital and innovative. First of all, we need to come up with a proper mission and push this message to universities and already established professionals. I think we need to get people excited about Company's digital future", said VP of Digital Portfolio Management.

Employer brand communication

Communication is a large part of enhancing a firm's employer brand image both internally and externally. The case company uses different communication channels. Besides aforementioned social media channels, it still takes in use ads and promotional brochures. "For example in VAMK we have a full wall with a Company's picture", commented Director of Communications. Sometimes newspapers are used to communicate about things that were done together with universities. However, a print media has not been used so much on the recruitment side.

Internally, Company has developed an Intranet and Global TV that is a service provided by Communications & Branding and IM departments. Global TV is a way to communicate topical issues via screens for internal and external use. There are

many other actions, which have been recently taken due to digital transformation. So that, employees can follow the recent developments and upcoming events or become Digital champions. A new digital newspaper has been launched for employees to keep up with digital transformation.

One of the channels that Company has been working on is to get its employees to talk positively about the company on social media. “I think this would be the best marketing channel we could have. If we treat our employees well and they like working for us that is the key to getting more people interested”, explains Director of Communications. This is closely related to an element of employee value proposition, discussed in chapter 2.2.1 – Employee experience, which is probably one of the biggest things that companies need to focus on, because of increased transparency in a digital world. Director of Culture and People supported this by saying that, “Besides, I think that the most important thing in employer branding is to take care of your own current employees, making sure that they are happy, because the world is very transparent these days. Of course people always trust what employees say. That’s the biggest thing which affects an employer brand”.

Dyhre and Parment (2009) emphasized that it is important for companies to communicate its employer brand image through the correct channels, once it knows its target groups. Targeted potential employees may have different preferences for searching for employer information, and Company needs to aim its communication efforts to the right channels. “I believe we need to be more flexible with the communication channels. It is constantly changing where people are, and what is popular at the moment. The thing is that we need to understand the audience in certain channels and based on this, target a message accordingly”, commented Director of Digital Ventures.

Employee value proposition

As written in theory chapter, employer value proposition (EVP) is the unique set of benefits that the company promises its employees and employment experience is the promise in reality. Rosethorn (2009, 20-23) and Hubschmid (2012) agree that as candidates seek for an employer, they have certain expectations that need to

be emphasized in the company's EVP. According to the interviewees, Company does not have a clearly defined EVP and does not plan to create it. However, all elements of EVP exist in the company.

Company knows what it stands for as an employer and what kind of promises it can provide to its employees. Company has brand promises and set of values that are Energy, Excellence and Excitement. However, if a company is just focusing on values, it tends to miss an employer brand personality (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, 60-61). The personality of an organization is generally seen through its communication style, i.e. the overall tone and style. Ideally, the external brand personality should already reflect the internal culture (Barrow and Mosley, 2005, 60-61).

It has been acknowledged, that for the Communications department it would be easy if there were a short message that can be shared globally. "If you always communicate the same thing, it's clear and it's always there, then people start to learn it and talk about it. This is a strong EVP", commented Director of Communications. EVP is critical to attracting the target audience and communicating what makes a company a great place to work. It helps to differentiate from competitors and helps strengthen the companies' employer brand.

According to the interviewees, many multinational companies in Finland have similar benefits to offer to employees. If a company has something that cannot be easily copy, people will have a strong reason to join it. One of the main differentiators, according to the interviewees is a leadership. As Director of Communications observed, "Nowadays, people do not look for a good company, they are looking for a good boss. We should have the best leadership." Often people come to the company for a few years and then leave, just because the company's name looks good on their CV. It means that people get trained and leave. Hence, it is important to create a company culture and an effective leadership to engage employees.

The interviewees also discussed the importance of Company's ability to deliver on its brand promise to current and potential employees. "We need to be brutally honest and it starts with being honest to yourself. When management is talking

about culture and employer brand, they think it's about the future. When employees are talking about culture and employer brand, they mean what company has right now. There is usually a huge gap", commented Director, Culture and People.

Once Company embark on the digital transformation, it actually means a fundamental change in the way of thinking; including how to attract talents or how to treat the current employees on overall scale. As VP of Digital Portfolio Management observed, "The whole grading method and system we have at the moment is for the industrial company. Salaries are typically higher in the digital field. We have been pretty much straggling with HR just to come up with our own grading system or way to do it for the digital talent."

Employer branding to Engineering students

It has been determined during the interview that Company is specifically interested in improving its employer brand image among Engineering students. Company understands that in order to deliver on its promise, it needs students or graduates who are innovative, passionate and able to drive the company forward. "Definitely Company is looking for a mix of established professionals and young people, but it also needs to build some of the talents in-house. Thus, they need to look at a little bit junior level – fresh out of school", explains VP of Digital Portfolio Management. However, the challenge here is how to pick the top skilled and how to distinguish between the best ones and average ones.

Director of Digital Ventures confirmed that, "They need to be engineering elements. Of course, we are a technology company, thus ICT, Technology and Engineering are in scope. Essentially what we are looking for is new fields of business whether it's about technology, or whether it's about purely digitizing services". When it comes to personal qualities, VP of Digital Portfolio Management replied, "I think it is a combination of qualities, when we are talking about teams or "tribes". The whole diversity is something that we need to force and embrace. I do not think there is "one size fits all" approach, especially in that domain. It's all about passion, enthusiasm and motivation".

According to the interviewees, typical Generation Y people do not like hierarchy, bureaucracy and authorities. They are people, who are able to absorb a lot of information. This generation wants companies to be as transparent as possible. When they are doing their daily work, they are able to make decisions by themselves. Young people appreciate these days that work has some meaning, because they are not so concerned about their financial situation. "The most important thing is that you know that your work is meaningful and you belong to a group of people you want to belong to, you appreciate them, and you learn something new every day", said Director of Culture and People.

Director of Communications emphasized, "I have seen a couple of surveys on Generation Y, who are now coming to a working life. They said that managers should be as coaches, but not authoritative leaders". GEN Y wants to have close relationship with managers, to get more support from them than before. And they see it as a managers' job to do. It has been also mentioned that Generation Y would like to be flexible in working time. If they do not like something, they will change the company without hesitation. In order to thrive, companies need to realize that they need to be flexible and create an environment that is attractive to young talents.

As it has been discussed earlier Company's current employer brand practices include cooperation with students. Company attended events and programs for engineering students as well as recruitment and career fairs. However, according to the interviewees, these are too old-fashioned ways to reach target audience. "Instead of typical recruitment fairs, students would like to try what companies are doing to assess what their work will be like. We can give them cool assignments or arrange competition, just to make it as fancy as possible", commented Director of Culture and People.

In engineering area, Company has always been cooperating with students and universities in Helsinki area, mostly with Aalto University and Helsinki University of Technology. The interviewees pointed out that in fact Company had already used an innovation way of collaboration with Aalto University students. In 2013 Company established Innovative Node at Aalto University Campus. "We run joint projects

with Aalto University students. We provided a topic to work on, constant coaching, feedbacks and network to our company and outside our company, i.e. industry”, explains Director of Digital Ventures. He also added that, “This is an extremely excellent way to change employer brand of the Company. We have got great feedback. Many people were saying that it is totally changed the picture about our company. We have done this already and it is an innovative approach.” However, the central innovation activities were run down after a few years. As it was concluded by Director of Digital Ventures, “We were able to focus on topics that we knew are important for the Businesses, but probably too much ahead of time. Though definitely this is something that can be done for the customers in the future”.

Employer attractiveness and measurements

According to the interviewees, Company offers a truly international experience and development opportunities in different business fields as well as a career path. Company’s culture is very performance oriented and therefore, Company is able to offer challenging tasks to employees in all positions. “People and mission are the main reasons why people can choose Company to work for”, said Director of Culture and People. However, the interviewees acknowledged that Company is not really competitive, as many other multinational companies in Finland have the same attractive employer characteristics. Thus, it is important to find unique benefits to differentiate from competitors. “I am sure we have a lot of good things in the company, but we have not defined them yet. It would be good if something can be written down and communicated”, commented Director of Communications.

Company is a technology leader that is doing a revolution in marine industry and bringing digitalization there. It also saves the planet reducing the fuel consumption of big vessels. An opinion from the business side was that such companies as Reaktor or Vincit are considered as cool places to work at, but what they are missing is a strong mission. In a long-term Company can come up with a mission that will resonate with target audience. “What Company could possibly offer is the front seat in a digital transformation of a traditional industry. If one wants to be part of generating something new, then it is something we can offer. And then, it’s very

much about how we can brand ourselves, being the one who is leading the transformation within our traditional industries”, suggested Director of Digital Ventures. If Company can brand itself as a driver of transformation; it should be appealing for talents.

Company has identified its attractive employer characteristics, and it would be beneficial for the company to compare whether it fulfills its target audience’ employee expectations. Hubschmid (2012, 56) and Dyhre and Parment (2009, 86) agree that employer branding will have little effect unless an attractive workplace can be offered. In order to build a strong and attractive EVP, Company needs to also measure its employer attractiveness and compare it to its competitors.

Company has been using Universum survey results that are published on its official website. According to the interviewees, Company has not bought any in-depth analysis, but it had possibility to see from the open results how it was ranked in terms of brand. Glassdor platform is used to check the company reviews and ratings. Company had a Potential Park subscription for 1 year.

Internally, Company conducts a global employee engagement survey, called MyVoice. The purpose of the survey is to collect employee feedback on issues related to well being at work, the work environment, management and strategy, etc. MyVoice is conducted every second year and it is available in 18 different languages.

6.2 Qualitative student interviews on new ideas increasing collaboration between Company and Engineering students

This subchapter will present and analyse the data gained through the qualitative interviews conducted with Aalto University students from the Engineering department. After analyzing interviews with company’s representatives and having informal discussions with the University staff, it has been decided to investigate the Innovation Node concept further. Establishing such platform at University Campus

is already an innovation approach, which enables to bring together the talent of students and business experts for knowledge sharing and innovating.

Since the beginning of its operation, Open Innovation House was active and quite many big companies, like Nokia or HITT, were part of it. However, after a while companies started to move out and suddenly the building became empty. There were some internal and external reasons for Company to eventually leave the Open Innovation House facility following the other companies. Thereby, during the summer of 2017 the Innovation Node was closed down.

The following courses were run jointly with Aalto University: Product Development Project (PDP) and International Design Business Management program (IDBM). Under these courses, Company provided topics to work on as well as constant coaching, and network to the industry. “Students were very happy, because we were one of the companies that could support students along the journey. For several months, while students were working on their projects, we provided the office, where they could come on their own and work”, commented Director of Digital Ventures. Also, company’s representatives were always around to give guidance and advices.

The major 6 categories that emerged are Matchmaking and team formation, Company Introduction, Mentoring, Innovation Node facility, Location, Students’ suggestions. Each theme that emerged from the data is discussed and supported with examples of actual data. The actual interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

Matching and team formation

The PDP project was a compulsory part for students, whose major was in the product development. The total number of applicants was around 180–200, which were then grouped into teams of 10 people. Since the interviewed students took the PDP course in different semesters, a team formation approach proved to be different from year to year. In one case, students could join one of the Project managers and form a team. In another case, the University staff did an actual

matchmaking between students and companies, based on the preferences of both sides.

According to the interviewees, the first approach did not work so well. The challenge was that the teams could lack knowledge in a certain field. “The majority of students were Mechanical Engineers. There could be a few Coders or students from Design and Business schools. So, it was quite difficult to group them”. This example may indicate that the teams did not have a balanced set of skills, which was needed to complete the assignment. For instance, there were no Civil Engineers in the project related to Power Plants business. Another example is when students had to hire a proper Coder to complete their project related to the creation of an application with visual instructions using augmented reality.

In comparison, IBDM project was much easier to organize and it was better structured, according to a student, who participated in both courses. “IBDM is a collaboration of different Aalto schools. We were team of 4 students only. The team had members from Business school, School of Art and Design and school of Science”. It was 1-year proper research project with the industry, unlike PDP that was more hands on project.

On the other hand, the PDP course has been popular among Mechanical Engineers, which made the process of team formation even more complicated. Thus, in order to achieve a balanced set of skills in each team, the program could have been more promoted at University Campus to attract students from various Engineering and Computer Science departments. Additionally, Project managers, who have been selected prior the project, could have collected team members themselves by assessing what knowledge would be required to complete the task. This would give them a certain degree of desired independence and flexibility in making decision and accomplishing their task. Generation Y is considered as the most entrepreneurial generation to date (Martin, 2005, 41).

The second part of this theme is about what influenced students’ opinion when selecting companies and project topics. The chosen students were invited to the event at Design factory located in Aalto University Campus, where the participat-

ing companies pitched their projects. Each team met the companies to discuss what their expectations are and what resources students will get and so on. Almost all respondents emphasized that the main reason of choosing Company's project was the company's representative, who introduced the idea at the event: "He was the most enthusiastic about the idea". Another example of this: "We really liked how the mentor from the Innovation Node presented the topic. He was very motivating".

As it was written by Tapscott (2009, 160-169) Generation Y appreciates companies that communicate openly and act transparently. They also appreciate a friendly work environment; this also implies that the work itself should be fun. The social environment can serve as a source of motivation for Generation Y employees (Tapscott, 2009, 160-169). In fact, students, who were not aware of Company business before, gave to Company one of the top preferences to work with, as the company representative was very motivating and friendly. The opportunity to travel and visiting power plants' construction site was another factors that influenced students' opinion. In the end, students, who were not aware of Company before, ranked it as one of their top preferences to work with.

Company Introduction

The presented data gives an idea that students did not have enough information about the company's business during the course. Even though students learned a lot from the company's representatives in general, the majority of interviewees stated that it would be helpful to get more information on the business areas of Company, especially for international students: "Students did not know much about Company. They may know that is a heavy industry company, but were not aware of all business areas". Another example of this: "Company's setup is not easy to understand... It's very complex, in my opinion". It was not so easy to contact Company people and ask for more details, according to interviewees. They were afraid to seem silly in case someone has already provided the information.

On the other hand, in some projects, students were able to research the company themselves. They had visits to the company office in Vaasa and Turku as well as

the customer site. They also interviewed Company representatives and Top management, where they have got more information about the project. "It was very useful to learn how the company operates by talking to the Top management and Project managers from the Power Plant construction site". Due to the fact that Generation Y has grown up with transparent and quick communication, they tend to take it for granted. Therefore, the Gen Y expects organizations to have smooth and transparent communication with very little policies (Dyhre and Parment, 2009, 92).

Mentoring

Another important concept is the mentoring provided by Company and University. All students emphasized that at the phase of prototyping, it took some time to get feedbacks from Company's Top management. "We could have more feedback sessions arranged with Company". Or "When we started to prototype, and we supposed to present a solution, we encountered some challenges".

The interviewees also suggested that it would be better if more business people from the company's side were involved to the projects. "More people with technical knowledge could be involved to give answers to specific questions. Unfortunately, we could not get answers to all our questions, or we had to wait long time". There is another example that states: "Company's contact persons were not always related to the field of work and they could not know all answers", which implies that there was not enough specific knowledge in the field.

Some students noted that there was not enough internal mentoring from the University side: "It would be good to get more guidance and concrete advises from the University's tutors". Even if it has been admitted by the students that such projects encourage students to work with companies directly, they would still like to be more supervised by University.

Generation Y is continuously looking for feedback and advice from their superiors. Most likely this is a result of their strong ties to and constant feedback from their parents (Cruz, 2007, 11). Reflecting the theory, students were lacking feedbacks

from the Company management, especially at the prototyping stage. For example, in the project related to the application development, the whole process has strong focus on design of the application interface. However, students would want to spend more time on prototyping, user research and testing to get a proper solution. This would of course require more time and involvement from the Company side.

Taking into consideration that the majority of students were Mechanical Engineers, it was important for them to do something tangible as well. This statement can be also supported by the fact that Generation Y desires for immediate responsibility. According to Spiro (2006, 17): “Generation Y wants to make an important impact immediately on project they are involved in”. This could mean that they want to see tangible results, in order to measure their contribution. Another question that worried students is what happens to a product or solution afterwards, whether Company continues to develop it further or not?

Innovation Node facility

Company has never had any technical or R&D operations in Helsinki area. This means that it has been difficult for students to get any close collaboration or get to know the right people in the field, when they are not in a working distance from each other. Establishing of Innovation Node at University Campus would solve this problem. It was situated at Open Innovation House and that was also a University’s vision of where corporations should come.

During the project, students were only a few times at Innovation Node to present their ideas, get material and guidance from the company’s representatives. “We only visited Innovation Node for questions and presentations”, or “We have been there for few presentations and couple of times to get some resources before the final gala”. All interviewed students said that people at Innovation Node were helpful and the overall atmosphere was friendly. “Innovation Node was quite cozy. There was a kitchen, where we could discuss things having a cup of coffee. It felt like students are very welcomed there”. Another example of this: “We could go to the office whenever we wanted and get some material or ask questions”. Also,

students had the opportunity to use a meeting room at Innovation Node. “It was pretty useful to have our monthly meetings there”.

Considering that Generation Y prefers a high level of personal contact and expects companies have smooth and transparent communication with very little policies (Dyhre and Parment, 2009, 92), the existence of Company platform at University Campus is very important. The fact that students could simply drop in there, whenever needed and freely talk to Company people is seen as an advantage for students. This slightly wipes out formalities that students usually face when attending companies’ events or various kinds of recruitment fairs. Students who often visited Innovation Node commented that it was quite cozy and comfortable place. It felt like they are very welcomed there, not only when they had questions on the ongoing project.

Location

In relation to the previous theme, students have been asked whether they prefer to have such Innovation Node at University Campus or at Company premises. Out of 5 students 3 responded that location is not so important, they could easily travel to the company premises: “Location is not so important. Our budget was enough for traveling somewhere else”. This would enable close cooperation with the businesses and getting rapid feedback as well as access to recourses and material.

However, the rest said that it would be more convenient to have the platform at University Campus: “It is important to have such thing in the campus area. For students it would be much easier to drop in and talk to people freely”. It made things easier during the project, when they could walk in to the building and get quick feedback from the company side. Besides, the opportunity to use the Innovation Node premises for internal meeting was a useful addition. It has been also observed that: “There will be more formalities to go to the HQ for meeting someone or getting additional information”.

Student’s suggestions

All interviewed students were of the same opinion that working for such project is an opportunity to get the company's insights and contacts. "Business card exchange at the events can be pointless, as the recruitment process goes very formal anyway". After the project participation students either consider Company as a potential employee or applied for a summer job. "Small challenges or projects like that could help to learn about a company and the company can also recognize potential employees".

Different kinds of events or fairs are considered as important part of interaction with students, but such arrangements are usually limited by time, whereas projects last from 6 months to 1 year. "During this time you get better picture about the company and possibilities that it offers". Since the majority of students belong to the Engineering department, a common opinion was that these kinds of hands-on projects are the best ones, from where they can obtain practical experience. "It was totally different experience. I learned a lot". Students do not usually have such collaborations with companies, where they could actually get personal network.

Another comment regarding the recruitment events and fairs was that these are good arrangements, but usually students do not get enough information about the certain field of work. "It would be good if, for example, Engineers or Technicians present at such events". To obtain real feedback and details about the job, students prefer to talk to people from the field and not only to Human Resources staff. Students like to hear about the employer through people already working for the company.

The interviewed students also recalled a company excursion and sauna evenings. This only underlines how important it is for this generation to have a personal contact and networking. Sauna evenings prove that they value having fun and friendly environmental at work. However, as it was already mentioned, involvement of business people in such events can have a big impact.

One suggestion with relation to Innovation Node was to establish a digital platform within the company office, where students could have access. They could use it

for sharing their ideas, designs or prototypes and get feedback right from the business people.

7 Recommendations

This chapter provides recommendations based on theory and research results. The first set of improvement recommendations directed towards the company's employer branding practices. The second set of recommendation concerns the innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students that can be implemented by Company.

Interviews conducted with the company representatives revealed that Company's employee value proposition (EVP) is not yet defined or written down anywhere. As the saying goes: "Every company in the world has an EVP, whether it's defined or not or you are aware of it or not". However, every EVP should be clearly defined, as it helps to attract and retain talents. Therefore, my first recommendation to Company is to consider whether the EVP can actually bring the organization significant benefits, especially considering the ongoing digital transformation.

The process of defining EVP will help to re-engage current employees. It is important to first talk to the existing employees and understand what they value and what their needs are. This will also get them knowing that they can make an impact. Understanding of what people love about working for the company and what makes the company unique is something that needs to be actively communicated to potential candidates. The more clearly Company's EVP is defined and communicated, the more potential employees will be able to understand whether they fit the current company's culture or not. According to a study by Towers Watson - a global professional service firm - companies that deliver a unique EVP, are five times more likely to report highly engaged employees and twice as likely to report higher financial performance than their peers.

Company can improve the outcome of the EVP by utilizing the 3 steps analysis suggested by Dyhre and Parment in Chapter 2.2.1. These 3 steps will help to find gaps between the real situation and the EVP the company is attempting to build. In addition, the EVP needs to be positioned to a certain audience. Hubschmid (2012,

56) states that the EVP will be more attractive, when a company knows the specific groups it wants to target and knows their expectations. As Engineering students are one of the target groups of Company, the right EVP should help to attract them.

Secondly, Company should improve the employer attractiveness by communicating its EVP through the students' preferred channels. Based on the interviews results, Company has a good understanding of students' needs or Generation Y in general. It uses various social media channels. However, the question is what is really popular at the moment? For example, Facebook seems not so popular anymore among the younger generation. They tend to migrate to Instagram or Snapchat. Thus, Company should be flexible with channels it uses; understand the audience in these channels and then based on this, target the message.

Another recommendation I would give to Company is to measure its employment experience, employer attractiveness or employer brand image. For this, Dyhre and Parment (2009, 68-71) suggested to conduct employee satisfaction surveys or interviews to identify the strengths and unique aspects of the employer. Even if the company manages to attract best talents, the reality of how the employer brand is reflected across the organization will determine the company's ability to retain this talent. Thus, the internal MyVoice survey could be conducted more often, at least once a year. This will help to keep focus on improving employee engagement.

In continuation of the previous chapter, I would recommend to pay more attention to the existing employees. There is a risk to have disconnection between how the company presents itself externally and how the current employees view the company and what is actually like to work there. If it's not consistent, the brand will have a confusing message. The best way would be to accentuate the positive aspects of the company, but stay realistic and create a picture that people can relate to.

As the business representatives pointed out, once Company embraces digital transformation and starts to promote a culture of innovation, it requires fundamental changes to all internal processes to reflect the whole digital era. Tech or Digital

talents will always choose to work in a great culture or for a cool brand. Company needs to have a clear mission and get the potential employees excited about what the company is doing. Monetary incentives are important as well. A pay scale for the digital talent is typically higher than in a traditional industry. Thus, it is important to make sure that a compensation level for digital talents is competitive and appropriate for available positions.

According to the interviewees, Company has already well working and quite unique relationships with students and universities in Vaasa. However, this is not the case for all cities in Finland. In general, Company has a good scope of traditional methods of collaboration with students. It actively participates in various events, programs or recruitment fairs. Company's participation at such events for students definitely increases awareness and improves its employer brand image. Cable and Turban (2001, 154) stated that top of mind companies for students are those who participate at events, fund scholarships and arrange speakers for classes.

Based on the students' suggestion gathered during the interviews or informal discussions, the following general improvement to the traditional methods of collaboration can be considered. Recruitment fairs are important events to get to know more about companies and familiarize yourself with their business before applying. However, a common opinion among respondents was that they would like to meet the business representatives at such events as well. Engineering students prefer to talk to Engineers working at the company to get real feedback and details on the job they may do it in the future.

The same applies to company excursions. Students demand to have personal contact with the business representatives and communicate with them openly and freely. Also, sauna evenings happened to be the most appealing arrangement, at least for engineering students. This only proves that for this generation all forms of communication become more casual and friendlier.

Another common opinion among Engineering students was that the best collaboration that can be done with companies are hands-on projects, case studies or any

kind of assignments, where students get a real challenge that needs to be solved. Students always search for opportunities where they could obtain practical experience and start to create network while they are at the university. This leads me to the main concept that has been discussed with interviewees, i.e. Company's Innovation Node.

The purpose of establishing the Innovation Node at Aalto University Campus was to get visible and get students to know Company better. A more practical aspect was to have a physical location in the campus area, where Company could take in students to do a project work or master's thesis/PhD work. Having a Company office in the campus area, where students can be employed by the company, for example, for the master's thesis work, is very beneficial for them. Already then, they can mention in their CVs a work experience in the multinational company.

Both parties, i.e. business representatives and Aalto students participated in the projects, were of the opinion that the Innovation Node is already an innovative approach, which enables a close cooperation between Company and students. There are not many companies who do such collaboration, where students can get access to the company's resource. Company received a positive feedback from all stakeholders during the Innovation Node functioning. However, last year the central innovation activities were run down for certain reasons that are not discussed in this thesis.

In my opinion, this is an extremely good way to change already established perceptions about the company and attract great talents. From the interviews it can be noticed that Company is seen positively by students, after the projects participation. What is more important, respondents consider Company as their future employer. Moreover, some of them became summer trainees or thesis workers afterwards.

From the company's perspective, it gives a big advantage in identifying best talents. There are plenty of active Engineering students, but how to recognize and attract the best ones. Students who applied for the course and have been chosen for the project are already standing out from the crowd. Also, Company has a pos-

sibility to pick the most active ones, who have some outstanding ideas or who can prove themselves in the projects.

Considering the above, the following recommendations on the Innovation ways of collaboration are made:

1. Company presence at University campus

According to students, the idea of having a Company office in the campus area is seen as a big advantage. It would be much easier if students could simply drop into the office and freely talk to the company representatives, whenever they have questions or ideas to share. It has been observed from the students' answers that they really enjoyed Company's evening programs with workshops arranged at Open Innovation House. They had a possibility to meet people from the business side and get familiar with what Company is nowadays. Also, HR personnel can be present at the office from time to time, for example, during the application period for a summer internship or mentoring programs. Especially at this time students may have a lot of questions and they will definitely appreciate support from the HR stuff.

2. Reopen the Innovation Node

Based on the research findings, it makes sense to bring the Innovation Node to life again. Company could take into service the students' feedbacks presented in the previous chapter for the process improvement.

3. Digital Acceleration Center (DAC)

The last but not least suggestion is to bring students to the company and give them a chance to be on board of something totally new. As a part of digital transformation, Company has recently launched a Digital Acceleration Centre, which acts as an accelerator for new ideas. DAC process includes 4 phases: Ideate, Incubate, Transform and Growth. The Ideate and Incubate are the phases, where students could possibly be involved. Even though the Incubation phase maybe quite short (4-7 weeks), with the right support and guidance it should be enough time for young fresh minds to experience the real work environment and learn something new.

The Ideate phase of DAC process, where ideas are gathered, correlates with one of the students' suggestions to establish a digital platform within the company, where students could have access to share their ideas, designs or prototypes, and get feedbacks directly from the Businesses.

8 Conclusions

The main objective of the research was to investigate what innovative ways of collaboration with Engineering students can be implemented by the case company, in order to change already established brand perceptions of Company and attract top university graduates with the right potential. Theoretical framework of the research was built using various concepts of Employer branding as well as characteristics of Generation Y, including their preferences for organizational attractiveness.

It was decided to use qualitative semi-structured interviews to reach the above stated objective. For the internal interviews the following company representatives were selected: HR Specialists, Director of Communications and several business representatives, mainly from the recently established Digital organization. The result showed that at the time of research interviews, Company's global employer branding practices were at the early development stage. The department of a Global Resourcing and Employer Branding was established only in 2014. However, in Finland the employer branding activities had been already going on for many years. Company takes part in many events and uses various communication channels. During the interview, it became clear that despite of extensive actions in influencing the company's employer brand image, Company is not well known among engineering students in such cities as Helsinki or Tampere. Another finding was that Company does not have a clearly defined EVP and does not plan to create it in the future. Though, all elements of EVP already exist.

The business representatives' opinion on the company's employer brand was that Company is still old fashioned and it is quite difficult to differentiate, especially taking into account the current presumptions of what Company is doing. Thus, it would be generally better to brand the company more digital and innovative to get people excited about the company's digital future. The Business's aim is to attract engineering and technology talents, who are innovative, passionate and able to drive Company forward.

The key finding from the external interviews conducted among Engineering students of Aalto University was that Company's Innovative Node established at University Campus is already one of the best innovative approaches that entirely changed students' opinion about the company in general. All interviewed students were of the same opinion that working for project conducted at Innovation Node is an opportunity for them to get the company's insights and contacts. After the project participation students either consider Company as a potential employee or applied for a summer job.

In my opinion, Company should continue utilizing the Innovation Node setup, as it may have a good impact on its employer brand among students and not only from the engineering area. Such extensive projects require knowledge from different areas, for example, Project Management, Design, Software Development, etc. With the existing DAC, Company has an option to invite students to the company's premises. Besides, the Innovation Node idea gives understanding of what students appreciate the most. They like to participate in interactive activities; they appreciate being challenged and encouraged to further their skills; they simply want to be heard, as many of them do have outstanding ideas. Thus, Company could take into consideration the students' feedback described in chapter 6 and based on it to upgrade already existing practices for young talent attraction not only in Helsinki, but in all biggest student cities in Finland.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview framework with Company

APPENDIX 2. Interview framework with Aalto students from the School of Engineering

Appendix 1. Interview framework with Company

Employer branding (EB)

1. What department is responsible for EB in the company (Is it fully under HR responsibility? If no, how the responsibility then divided between departments?)
2. What is your current focus on the employer brand? For example:
 - a) Attracting top talent
 - b) Improving retention / minimizing turnover
 - c) Improving employee engagement
3. What are the challenges (with regard to EB) the company is facing at the moment?
4. What kind of employer brand is the company attempting to build (target situation)?

Employer brand image

5. What kind of actions has the company taken in order to influence its employer brand image? (Within the past 3 years?)
6. How much information does the company currently have about its employer brand image?

Employer brand communication

7. How has the company's employer brand been communicated externally? What communication channels have been used for employer branding?

Employer Branding to X segment

8. Who is the company's target audience(s)?
9. What kind of actions has the company taken to promote its employer brand specifically to this (these) segment(s)?

Employee value proposition (EVP)

An EVP is about defining the essence of your company; how it is unique and what it stands for. The EVP gives current and future employees a reason to work for an employer and reflects the company's competitive advantage. Employers that manage their EVP effectively benefit from an increase in their talent pool and employee engagement. To develop a strong EVP you must first understand what perceptions, existing staff and potential employees have about your company brand and culture: Why do existing employees think the company is unique? What does they value most about working there? Why do they stay/leave?

10. Does the company have a clearly defined employee value proposition (EVP)?

IF YES:

11. How is the EVP defined? What elements does the EVP contain?

12. How is the EVP communicated to the employees?

13. Is the EVP communicated externally? (If yes, how?)

14. How the company's EVP differentiated from its competitors?

15. Has the company segmented its EVP specifically to certain talent segments?

IF NO:

11. Is the company currently attempting to build an EVP (If yes, how is the company trying to build it)?

12. In your opinion, why should a talented, well qualified, and motivated person prefer your company to all the others as an employer?

Employer brand attraction & measurements

13. What are the company's most attractive employer characteristics?

14. Do you measure employer attractiveness? How often is it measured?

APPENDIX 2. Interview framework with Aalto students from School of Engineering

1. Could you tell a couple of words about the project you participated in?
2. Did you know about Company before the PDP course? What was the reason to pick Company's topic?
3. Have your opinion about Company changed afterwards?
4. What did you like most about the course and Innovation Node in general?
5. Was there anything you would improve in it?
6. Would you prefer to have such Innovation Node at University Campus or at Company premises?
7. Would you have any suggestions on what can be the innovative ways of collaboration between students and companies?